



Wyoming  
DEPARTMENT OF Agriculture

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*The Wyoming Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources and quality of life.*

July 26, 2011

Scott Fluer, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist  
BLM, Lander Field Office  
1335 Main Street  
Lander, WY 82520

Dear Mr. Fluer:

Following are the Wyoming Department of Agriculture's (WDA) comments pertaining to the preliminary environmental assessment (EA) for the wild horse gather for the Red Desert Complex (Antelope Hills, Crooks Mountain, Green Mountain, Stewart Creek and Lost Creek) Wild Horse Management Areas (HMAs).

Our comments are specific to our mission: dedication to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources, and quality of life. As the proposed project affects our agriculture industry, our natural resources, and the welfare of our citizens, it is important you continue to inform us of proposed actions and decisions and continue to provide us the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns.

The WDA supports the continued work of the BLM to manage wild horse populations in the State of Wyoming, while providing for the protection of rangeland resources. We believe it is imperative to not only remove all wild horses outside the HMAs, but to also remove excess wild horses to the low end of the set Appropriate Management Level (AML) for each HMA.

We wish to stress the importance of ongoing, active management measures to maintain HMA populations within the each HMA's established AML. Immediate action is imperative to:

- maintain wild horse populations within each HMA's AML;
- maintain the integrity of approved HMA boundaries through the removal of wild horses outside these boundaries; and
- follow the new federal guidance to slow population growth with the use of fertility control in mares.

The WDA appreciates the reference to the State of Wyoming Consent Decree (Consent Decree) dated August 14, 2003, between the State of Wyoming and U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Within the Consent Decree, number three (3) of the "Terms of Agreement" states "... in 2004, and for future planned gathers during the term of this Consent Decree, to remove sufficient wild horses to meet the lower end of the AML that is currently set for each HMA."

The proposed management action to Catch, Treat and Release (CTR) wild horses from the Red Desert Complex and surrounding area; treat all mares released with Immunocontraceptive Porcine Zona Pellucida-22 (PZP-22); and to remove excess wild horses residing outside the HMAs will not provide for compliance

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with the Consent Decree. Throughout the preliminary EA, BLM refers to removing a limited number of horses to attain mid-point of AML. This action is not compliant with the Consent Decree.

Population surveys conducted in August 2010 revealed approximately 827 horses within these HMAs – 347 over the low end of the established AML for these HMAs. Additionally, there were reported to be 370 outside the approved HMA boundaries and the WDA insists BLM remove all wild horses outside the HMAs from the range. The total number of wild horses in the Red Dessert Complex is estimated at 1197, more than 65% higher than the high end of AML and 149% above the low end of AML. We consider these numbers to be more than “slightly over.” Please reword paragraph 3 on page 6 to read “...populations in the HMAs would be over the high AML limit.”

Page seven (7) states “removing a limited number of animals inside the HMAs, down to the mid-point AML of 602.” Again, we do not believe this approach to be compliant with the Consent Decree and would ask the BLM to remove the number of animals to achieve the low end of AML as directed in the Consent Decree.

The WDA would offer support and appreciation for the including information obtained from vegetative monitoring activities conducted in the Red Desert Complex. Providing scientific data on which decisions can be made strengthens the document and the need for the action. Furthermore, we thank-you for acknowledging the reduction of permitted livestock grazing use and the attempt by permittees to balance use within the HMAs. As a result of the data and information provided, we believe the resource with the largest impact is livestock grazing management. We do not believe the statement “No impact related to gather activities” adequately represents Alternative 2-No Action for Livestock Grazing Management. We would ask that impacts of forage reduction, forage quality, vegetative composition, increased bare ground, the potential increase of invasives and reduced forage available for other multiple uses be reflected in Table 3 on page 16 of the EA under Alternative 2 – No Action.

Pages 18-21 of the EA provide an excellent gather history of gathers and removals of wild horses from the HMAs within the Red Desert Complex. The most recent gather for the Red Desert Complex was in November 2009 and yet the population estimate barely a year later shows HMAs to be at two to three times higher than the lower end of AML. Gathers should provide for budget and time efficiencies and work toward the goal of extending the time period before another gather is necessary to remove excess wild horses.

We support the use of fertility control vaccine during the gather. Administering the PZP-22 to mares has the potential to slow population growth and extend the time period before another gather to remove excess wild horses. Although we support this action, we want to stress the importance of continued census counts to manage populations and not rely on the unproven effectiveness of PZP-22 controlling wild horse populations in Wyoming HMAs. We also ask for BLM’s continued attention to timely removal of horses moving outside the defined HMA boundaries in future years.

With 54,227 non-BLM acres included in these HMAs, it is crucial BLM staff work closely and proactively with landowners/permittees in the HMA and surrounding areas. It is important to utilize the knowledge of landowners/permittees to identify locations of horses at gather time, in addition to where these wild horses cause negative impacts on the natural ecological balance of the range.

The WDA works closely with the Wyoming conservation districts to conserve and protect the quality of life for the citizens of the state. We strongly encourage the BLM work closely with the local conservation districts and consider their comments in finalizing the EA and ultimate decision.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed environmental assessment. We encourage continued attention to our concerns and look forward to hearing about and being involved in future proposed actions and decisions.

Sincerely,

  
*for* Jason Fearneyhough  
Director

JF/lis

CC: Steven Ferrell, Governor's Policy Office  
Jerimiah Rieman, Governor's Policy Office  
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union  
Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts  
Wyoming Board of Agriculture  
Wyoming Game and Fish Department  
Wyoming State Grazing Board  
Wyoming Stock Growers Association  
Wyoming Wool Growers Association  
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