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WILD HORSES VICTIMS OF WILDLAND FIRES

Wild horses on Nevada's rangelands fled the flames as fire destroyed 1.6 million acres of public lands in August and September. Some of that land was wild horse habitat. As winter approaches, many of these animals find themselves on unfamiliar rangeland which has little available forage and water.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will begin this week removing about 1,500 wild horses as part of its efforts at rehabilitation and long-term restoration of the rangeland. "Younger animals removed from the rangelands will be placed in the adoption program," according to Bob Abbey, BLM Nevada State Director. "Older animals will be transported to the BLM's sanctuary in Bartlesville, Oklahoma."

"There are some herds which have serious habitat losses, and in order to save the character and genetics of those herds, we will move those animals either into a different Herd Management Area (HMA) or onto private pasture until the range recovers," Abbey said. "They will be returned to their HMA when vegetation re-establishes."

Abbey says BLM's business office in Denver will advertise for pasturage in Nevada in the near future. Private areas must be fenced and on privately owned, not public, land.

The habitat in 13 HMAs was significantly affected by the fire, although BLM employees identified 23 areas where fire destroyed part of the animals' territory. HMAs which require management intervention are: Diamond Hills North, Elko Co.; Rocky Hills, Eureka Co.; New Pass-Ravenswood, Lander Co.; Snowstorm, Humboldt Co.; the Seven Troughs, Pershing Co.; Clan Alpine, Churchill Co.; and Flanigan, Washoe Co.

Wild horses in the Simpson Park Mountain Range, near but not a part of the Callaghan HMA in Lander Co., will also be gathered and removed. In Pershing Co., wild horses will be removed from the Majuba Mountains, which is not a HMA.

"If rehabilitation, such as seeding, is needed and implemented, that area will be closed to all grazing and will require the removal of both wild horses and livestock," Abbey said. "It may take burned ranges from two to four years to recover."

Abbey explained that specialists looked at fire-affected HMAs to determine if there would be year-long feed and water for the animals. Water developments were checked to determine if they are still viable and if the distance between forage and water is reasonable. Also considered were the impacts of wild horses seeking forage on other HMAs, leading to overuse of that vegetation, or on lands outside HMAs.

Local veterinarians are always identified for assistance and consultation during gathers. Although there are no indications of fire-related health problems with these horses, the BLM is consulting with the

U.S. Department of Agriculture's Federal field veterinarian stationed in Nevada in case of unexpected complications.

Emergency fire rehabilitation money is being sought to cover gather cost and habitat reseeding. Abbey says a supplemental appropriation from Congress is being requested for other costs, such as adoption, removal to other HMAs and pasture contracts.

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