

Black Mountain Wild Horse Territory



The Black Mountain Wild Horse Territory (WHT) is administered by the Santa Lucia Ranger District, Los Padres National Forest, California.

Location/Habitat

The Black Mountain WHT is located in California approximately 20 miles east of San Luis Obispo. The territory consists of 13,215 acres of National Forest land and 635 acres of private land and lies primarily on the east side of the La Panza Mountain Range.

The topography of the area is steep with narrow drainages and limited watering sources. Elevations range from 1600 to 3600 feet. The climate is typically Mediterranean with hot summer temperatures and cool winters. Precipitation is in the form of rain with occasional snowfall. The wet season is normally from November through March, and average annual precipitation is 12 inches.

The territory consists of Blue Oak annual grasslands and Chaparral vegetation. Monitoring indicates that the rangeland is healthy.

Wildlife present within the territory include black-tailed deer, mountain lion, black bear, bobcat, coyote, grey fox, raccoon, woodrats, ground squirrels, and numerous bird, reptile, and amphibian species.

There are no livestock grazing permits in the wild horse territory.

History

The origin of the Black Mountain herd began about 1907 when the Bethal brothers ran cattle and horses on National Forest land. The original Bethal horses were a blending of blood brought west with the covered wagons and the blood of the wild stock of Spanish origin. The Bethals then bred these mares with “blooded” studs of Morgan, Hambletonian, Steel Dust, and other popular bloodlines.

During World War I, the Bethals sold horses to the U.S. Army as remounts. After the war in the 1920's, the value of horses declined, and the Bethal horses became wild as they were allowed to roam unmanaged on Forest land. The free-roaming horses ranged from Wilson Canyon to as far east as Carrizo Plains and La Panza.

Periodically, the horses were rounded up and sold to traders in the area. During the 1960's a "Mustang Magazine" published the existence of the Black Mountain wild horses, which drew local people and parties to the area to trap the horses. By 1971, the herd size had diminished to about 7 horses.



Herd Description

The Black Mountain WHT is managed for an appropriate management level of 20 horses. Occasionally, horses of similar size, conformation, and color are introduced from other territories in order to maintain genetic diversity in this small herd. Most of the horses in the Black Mountain WHT are of good size and conformation, and bay is the dominant color.

For More Information

Contact the Santa Lucia Ranger District at 805-925-9538.