

REFUGE MANUAL

6. Feral Horses and Burros

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NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

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- 6.1 Scope. This chapter describes the role and management of feral horses and burros within the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS); the influence on the System of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act (P.L. 92-195), as it applies to the management of these animals on public lands; and the authority and management of this resource as it relates to specific refuges where these animals occur, i.e., Sheldon, Hart Mountain, Kofa, Cibola, Imperial, and Havasu National Wildlife Refuges (NWR).

This chapter does not specifically address the management of stray livestock and/or feral animals other than horses and burros; however, it is coordinated with those chapters that do. (See 7 RM 8, 7 RM 12, and 7 RM 14.) Likewise, it is not specific as to the management of the privately-owned horses on Chincoteague NWR, which are administered under a special use permit.

- 6.2 Policy. It is the policy of the Service that feral horse and burro populations will not be maintained on Sheldon, Hart Mountain, and Kofa NWR's. Feral horses and burros on these refuges will be removed in accordance with the provisions of 50 CFR 30.12 and Section 6.9, below.

On Cibola, Imperial, and Havasu NWR's, feral horse and burro populations will be reduced to and maintained at the lowest possible level. Reduction will occur in accordance with cooperative agreements with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) since the animals on these refuges are protected by the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act. (See Section 6.4B, below.)

Feral horses and burros shall not be introduced, established, or allowed to become established on any national wildlife refuge.

- 6.3 Objective.

A. To comply with the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (P.L. 92-125), where applicable.

- 6.4 Authorities.

A. 50 CFR 30. Sections 30.1 and 30.2, Title 50, Code of Federal Regulations, provide for the disposal of surplus range animals, and Sections 30.11 and 30.12 address control and disposition of animals which are surplus or detrimental to the refuge objectives.

B. Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act (P.L. 92-195, 16 U.S.C. 1331-1340). This Act is directed specifically at the preservation and management of "wild" horses and burros occurring on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service. It also applies to those animals that range on-and-off

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refuge lands from adjacent public lands. The Act does not apply to wild horses and burros that range only on refuge lands.

- C. Public Law 86-234. This Act prohibits the use of aircraft or motor vehicles for capturing or killing wild horses or burros on lands belonging to the United States. (Note, however, that the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (P.L. 94-597) amends the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act (P.L. 92-195) to allow the Secretary through the Bureau of Land Management the use of helicopters or motor vehicles to carry out the administration of that Act).

6.5 Definitions.

- A. Feral horses and burros. Non-indigenous, unbranded, unclaimed descendants of domestic horses and burros which roam free on certain refuge lands in the western United States.
- B. Public lands. Lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management or the U.S. Forest Service.
- C. Refuge lands. Lands of the NWR System, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

- 6.6 Feral horse and burro management plan. In cases where horses and burros wander back and forth between refuge lands and public lands, cooperative management planning will occur with the appropriate agency (e.g., BLM) and a joint management plan must be developed. (See 43 CFR 4710.3 and 4730.6, and Section 6.8, below.)

- 6.7 NEPA compliance. Each new horse and burro plan or major modification of an existing plan will comply with NEPA. (See 4 RM 5, NEPA Compliance.)

- 6.8 Population goals and management. Where wild horses and burros range on-and-off public lands, close coordination with the Bureau of Land Management is necessary to assure refuge objectives receive consideration when population goals are set on adjacent public lands. The following criteria should be used to determine population levels:

1. Vegetation conditions and trend.
2. Availability of water.
3. Degree of conflicts with all wildlife forms.
4. Compatibility with refuge objectives.
5. BLM horse/burro management policy on adjoining public lands.

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6.9 Population control and animal disposal.

- A. On Sheldon, Hart Mountain, and Kofa NWR's, the preferred methods of control are biological control or live capture. If neither is feasible, surplus animals may be destroyed, provided the methods are approved by the regional director. All control activities will be conducted as humanely as possible.

Captured animals may be disposed of, subject to State and Federal health laws and regulations, by gift or loan to public or private agencies or institutions for specific purposes, or sold on the open market (50 CFR 30.2 and 30.12).

- B. On Cibola, Navajo, and Imperial NWR's, methods of control and disposal will be in accordance with cooperative agreements with BLM.

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