

Briefing

Date: June 9, 2003

Title: 1California Desert Wild Horse and Burro Management

Issue: Future role/activities of the DMG in California Desert Wild Horse and Burro Management

Background:

In January 1999, the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) California Desert District and the National Park Service's (NPS) Death Valley National Park and Mojave National Preserve signed the California Desert Strategic Plan for the Management of Wild Burros. This document recognized the overpopulation of wild burros on the desert and the adverse impacts that were occurring as a result of this overpopulation. It outlines the California Desert land managing agencies' process to work collaboratively in sharing staff and resources to manage wild burros an effective and efficient manner.

This wild burro strategy outlines several key goals and objectives and associated management actions to be achieved (attached). A key elements to the strategy, is to aggressively remove existing excess burros to reach appropriate management levels (AML). AML has been defined for the various heard management areas in several BLM's land management plans that were recently finalized. NPS' management goal is to remove all burros from inside the park boundaries and implement actions to ensure that they do not reenter from adjacent public lands. They have identified a three phase approach to achieving this goal:

1. a period where NPS staff/contractors will actively remove and adopt as many burros as possible,
2. a period for animal rights groups to remove any remaining animals; and
3. direct or lethal removal of remaining animals by NPS staff or contractors to achieve a zero population.

Depending on area, NPS is in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the approach. The point at which NPS moves to Phase 3 will depend on the continued success and progress under Phases 1 and 2.

Current Status and Future Plans:

BLM, NPS and various other agencies (Fish and Wildlife Service; California Department of Fish and Game; BLM Field Offices in Yuma and Havasu; Military Reservations including China Lake, Chocolate Mountain Gunnery Range, and Ft. Irwin; Bureau of Reclamation, Metropolitan Water District, and the Chemehuevi Indian tribe) have worked collaboratively to accomplish the goals and objectives of the plan. As of October 2002, approximately 3,450 animals have been removed from throughout the California Desert. This averages 986 animals annually which is significantly more than the historical average of 200 to 400 animals annually that past funding would allow.

The DMG 5 year plan includes a task for the development and adoption of consistent burro population monitoring/census methods among DMG agencies. To date, little progress has been made on this task.

For FY 03, BLM plans to remove 600 burros from the California deserts. So far, 473 have been removed from the following areas:

- 224 from Chemehuevi
- 58 from Clark Mountains
- 20 from Panamint Mountains,
- 73 from Centennial Range
- 70 from Slate Range, and
- 24 from outside HMAs.

For the remainder of FY 03, BLM plans to remove an additional 125 animals through water trapping (20 from Centennial, 15 from Slate Range, 25 from Chemehuevi, and 20 from Clark Mountains, and 45 from the Picacho State Park).

BLM has established vegetative monitoring studies within the Picacho Herd Area Complex, Chemehuevi HMA, Clark Mountain HMA, Panamint HMA, and Centennial HMA. BLM and the California Fish & Game are two years in a five year migration study to monitor the seasonal movements of both burros and deer within the Picacho Herd Area complex. BLM and California State Parks are in the process of finalizing a MOU that will allow State Parks to remove burros that are impacting Picacho State Park along the Colorado River. BLM has a policy of accepting into their adoption program at no cost to NPS all burros captured by NPS that fall within the jurisdiction of the Wild Horse and Burro Act.

In FY04, BLM plans to remove approximately 500 burros, including the remaining 190 burros in the Clark Mountains. In the Ivanpah Mountains (just south of Clark Mountains adjacent to and within the Mojave NP) an estimated 100 animals will be removed; 150 from the Centennial and Slate range; 20 burros at the Picacho State Park; and another 50-75 burros throughout the desert which are outside HMAs.

In FY05, BLM plans to get down to AML throughout the desert by removing up to 500 burros. The focus will be on Centennial, Slate Range, Piute Mountains, Dead Mountains and remaining areas outside HMA's (adjacent to NPS lands still having transient burros crossing agency boundaries). Beginning in FY06, BLM expects to be in maintenance mode, removing animals where habitat impacts and population census dictates.

Since 1997, Mojave Preserve has removed 3022 burro. Current population estimates indicated that approximately 1000-2000 burros remain in the Mojave National Preserve. The goal is to remove 150-200 additional burros in FY 03. 53 animals have been removed so far in FY 03. At least 100 burros need to be removed annually just to keep the population at current levels. The Preserve would like to remove 200 animals per year. However, actual numbers will depend on funding availability. The Mojave NP has no active plans to go to lethal means to remove the remaining burros at this time

There has been a long history of burro management at Death Valley National Park. While no census has been completed since the late 1990, an estimate 500 burros remain in Death Valley NP primarily in the areas of Saline Valley, Butte Valley, and Wild Rose. Some burros are immigrating into the Park from the National Training Center. Only 9 burros have been captured in FY03 and it is becoming increasingly difficult to capture additional burros using helicopter roundups and water trapping. Death Valley NP has no active plans to go to lethal means to remove the remaining burros at this time

Conclusion and Proposed Next Steps

The burro management program in the California desert has been a major success story of the land management agencies and the DMG. Over 3000 of burros have been removed and adopted out since the California Desert Strategic Plan for the Management of Wild Burros was signed in 1999. Prescribed population levels will be achieved by FY 06 on BLM lands. A new cooperative effort with Cal State Parks will focus on addressing impacts to State Park resources along the Colorado River.

A large burro population continues to exist at the Mojave NP and current funding is inadequate to reduce the population.

Recommendations:

1. BLM and the NPS should discuss increased cooperative efforts to control burro in and adjacent to the Mojave NP and Death Valley National Park.
2. The DMG should support NPS funding request for burro management in the Mojave NP and Death Valley NP.
3. The DMG should develop and broadly disseminate a report or brochure which summarizes accomplishments since the California Desert Strategic Plan for the Management of Wild Burros was signed in 1999. (Note: Some funding and technical support is needed to finalize the report/brochure). The report or brochure could also be used by NPS to attract private funding or support for burro removal on their lands.
4. There is a continuing need for DMG agencies to develop and use consistent burro population monitoring/census methods. The DMG should establish an ad hoc group to develop consistent burro population monitoring/census methods.

Summary
California Desert Strategic Plan for the Management of Wild Burros
January 8, 1999

Parties: BLM-CDD, Mojave National Preserve, Death Valley National Park

Goals:

1. Provide collaborative/efficient burro management in the Cal Deserts
 - Develop coordinated annual operations plan. Seek funds to carry out plan
2. Aggressive manage burros to reach current AML in 3 years
3. Manage burros as part of the natural ecosystem on BLM lands to avoid impacts.
4. Manage for zero burros on non-BLM lands.
 - Determine viable herd management areas
 - Identify long term management objectives/actions and population levels in HMA's
 - Conduct research on burro behavior and movement

Management Actions

1. Identify HMA boundaries in BLM plans by 2002 in cooperation with NPS
2. Complete/revise HMA Plans by 2004 that ID conservation measures to protect important habitats
3. Establish key area to monitor range land health
4. Implement management actions to reduce animal drift off BLM lands

Gathers and Adoptions:

1. Priorities will be established based on resource issues
2. Each agency will identify numbers and locations of animal to be removed and establish agency priorities annually.
3. When feasible agencies will pool resources to get the job done.
4. Provide steady flow of animals into BLM's adoption program
5. Adoption options: (a) BLM adoption program (b) animal interest groups (c) private contractors (c) NPS direct/indirect adoption programs
 - only burro that spend part of their life on BLM land will enter the BLM adoption program in Kingman or Ridgecrest

Budget:

1. Each agency will request funds annually
2. No over head charge assessed on transfer of funds between agencies
3. Removal and deliver cost to be paid for by the agency administering lands where the animals are removed
4. NPS and BLM split cost for holding, feeding, and caring at Ridgecrest
5. BLM pays all cost for adoption