

Fox Lake Draft Research

Comments Due Thursday, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008

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Fox Lake Range Capture Plan  
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Preliminary EA# NV-020-08-EA-04

Gather Expected to begin July 2008

HMA Acres: 177,724

Capture 315  
Release 40  
Remove 270-275

The estimated number of wild horses remaining within HMA following the gather would be a minimum of about 122 animals.

Reproduction rate: 19% pg. 9

FY04: 466  
FY05: 119 +20% (24)= 143 FY06 +20% (29)= 172 FY07 +20% (34)= 206 FY08 +41=247  
FY06: 137  
FY07: 158

Section 4.1.8 Pg. 25  
AML Range 122-204  
Section 5.1.2 Pg. 28

AML was adjusted to a four year gather cycle instead of a three year in 2000 based on a 15% annual herd increase. This decision changed the range from 153-204 to a range of 122-204 wild horses. At present, the HMA has an estimated population of 394 wild horses.

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AML was established as a range of 153-204 wild horses within the Rodeo Creek Allotment in 1997 (Final Multiple Use Decision, 12/97) and as "0" wild horses for the Pole Canyon Allotment in 2000 (Final Multiple Use Decision, 4/00). The current AML range of 122-204 wild horses is based on a revision in 2000 which set the lower AML range at a number which allows the population to grow at about 15% per year to the high range of the AML over a 4 year period without the need for removals of excess animals in the interim (EA #NV020-00-50, 11/00).

The last gather occurred in January 2005 when 370 horses were removed to reduce excess wild horse impacts to rangeland resources. Following the 2005 gather, an estimated 137 wild horses remained on the range. However, a helicopter aerial census completed in December 2008 revealed a direct count of 331 head. (including foals) This number exceeds the established AML range and is expected to increase by 19% to a population size of about 400 head with the addition of the 2008 foal crop.

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Individual animal data from the 2005 gather identified common coat colors as bay (34%), brown (15%), sorrel (13%), and dun (10%). Observed phenotypes varied from extremely small slightbuilt horses to smaller ranch-type horses. Genetics are influenced by smaller Reservation horses and nutrition for young horses is likely limited by habitat potential and current forage conditions. The last capture sex ratio was 54% mares and 46% studs. Approximately 58% of the herd was 0-5 years old, 22% were 6-9 years old, and 20% were 10 years and older. Internal parasite loads were high as evidenced in manure and many foals and younger horses were in poor body condition (Henneke 2-3) and unthrifty (photos 17-18).

Proposed Actions:

A – Remove Horses Helicopter Only

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Another alternative considered but dismissed from detailed analysis was to water trap excess wild horses. While water quantity is limited in the project area, many sites are within the designated Wilderness Study Area or in steep, inaccessible locations, making them impossible to access. Thus, this alternative was dismissed due to inoperable logistics.

B- Don't Remove Horses

Livestock:

Pole Canyon Allotment: No Use status since 1986.

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However, no pasture fences separate livestock summerwinter use areas. The Pole Canyon Allotment has been in non-use status since 1986. According to the Final Multiple Use Decision dated April 5, 2000, grazing would not be authorized in the allotment until a boundary fence between the Pole Canyon Allotment and the Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation was completed. The fence was completed last summer, therefore it is foreseeable that livestock grazing may resume in the future.

Pole Canyon was re-issued on 3/01/06 and is authorized through 2/28/2016.

There are three pastures. 397 cattle 9/16-10/31, 250 cattle 8/01-9/15, 501 cattle 4/01-7/31  
2,988 AUMs 2000FMUD allowed 0 horse use.

Rodeo Creek Allotment:

#### 438 Cattle Year Round

117 were voluntarily removed in late August, 35 more in September and 43 in October due to lack of forage/water. Winter grazed 290 through May.

Lake Range:

Fox Range:

Wildlife:

Mule Deer and Pronghorn, both noted at low densities.

#### Section 8.0 Consultation and Coordination Pg. 31/32

##### Helicopter Hearing

Public hearings are held annually on a state-wide basis regarding the use of helicopters and motorized vehicles to capture wild horses (or burros). During these meetings, the public is given the opportunity to present new information and to voice any concerns regarding the use of these methods to capture wild horses (or burros). The Nevada BLM State Office held a meeting on May 15, 2008; a total of 116 individuals commented. Of these, 1 was an oral comment, 4 were written comments, and the balance were emails. Specific concerns included: (1) the use of helicopters and motorized vehicles is inhumane and results in injury or death to significant numbers of wild horses and burros; (2) bait and/or water trapping or removal by horseback are more humane methods of removal; (3) misconduct by gather contractors or others must be immediately corrected; and (4) fertility control, including sterilization of stallions should be considered rather than removing excess animals. Some expressed the desire that nature be allowed to take its course and that animals be left to die of thirst or starvation in lieu of gathers. Based on the number of concerns expressed with respect to the use of helicopters and motorized vehicles, BLM thoroughly reviewed the Standard Operating Procedures to assure that all necessary measures are in place to humanely capture, handle and transport Nevada's wild horses and burros during the upcoming gather season. No changes to the SOPs were indicated based on this review. This decision is based on the facts: over the past four years, BLM Nevada has gathered nearly 23,000 excess animals. Of these, mortality has averaged only one-half of one percent which is very low when handling wild animals. Another 7/10 of one percent of the animals captured were humanely euthanized due to pre-existing conditions and in accordance with BLM policy. This data affirms that the use of helicopters and motorized vehicles has proven to be a safe, effective and practical means for the gather and removal of excess wild horses and burros from the range. BLM also avoids gathering wild horses prior to or during the peak foaling season and does not conduct helicopter removals of wild horses during March 1 through June 30.

##### Population Modeling

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Actual survival probabilities and foaling rates for the Fox & Lake Range HMA are unknown,

Cherry Picked. Please include full data.