

Jackson Mountains Wild Horses Questions and Answers

Note to Readers:

The recent problems at Palomino Valley are primarily attributed to the very poor condition that the Jackson Mountain horses were in when they came off the range. Other horses from Palomino Valley that shipped out prior to the arrival of the Jackson horses in late August are at no increased risk of health problems related to the current situation there. Those horses pose no increased risk to other facilities, horses or adopters.

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PALOMINO VALLEY CENTER CLOSURE

Why is the Palomino Valley Center being closed?

There is a problem with salmonella at the facility. Salmonella can infect people and domestic animals. To address potential safety concerns for the public and BLM employees at PVC, the BLM is implementing a 30-day closure of the facility effective Wednesday, September 26. BLM will reevaluate conditions at the facility to determine if the closure should be extended.

What caused the problem of Salmonella?

The Jackson horses had been eating a poor diet of brush. When they arrived at the Palomino Center some of them had difficulty in transitioning to a diet of hay. Many of the animals were very thin, in poor physical condition, and weak due to a lack of forage and water resulting from the extended drought, which caused normal levels of Salmonella bacteria, present in the animal's gut, increase to levels that made the animals sick (diarrhea).

A large number of the horses were in condition class 1½ or 3 based on the Henneke rating system (thin or very thin). Most of the horses also came in with snotty noses resulting from alkali dust (due to drought), followed by a change in weather to hot days and cold nights.

What kind of veterinary care have the animals received?

There are no specific treatments to cure these complications in horses. They are being given supportive care and electrolytes. With good quality grass hay and fresh water most of the horses will slowly recover. Cultures are being examined in an effort to identify the specific type of salmonella. Horses showing signs of pneumonia are being treated with antibiotics. BLM is in consultation with USDA and the State Veterinarian who are advising and/or assisting with management of the situation.

How many horses are currently at PVC?

1,350

How many are Jackson Mountain horses?

850

How many horses are sick and how many are healthy?

Jackson horses;

- Approximately 25 are showing signs consistent with salmonella
- Approximately 6-8 show signs of pneumonia
- 4 are being treated for injuries

Non-Jackson horses:

- None are showing signs of salmonella
- Approximately 3 or 4 have pneumonia
- About 15-20 are in poor body condition
- 3 with injuries

How many of the Jackson Mountain horses have died to date?

- 109 have died due to poor condition and enteritis
- 16 due to pneumonia
- 7 due to other causes (euthanized due to injury, lameness, hernia, blindness)

Have other horses at the facility been affected?

No. The situation is specific to the Jackson Mountains horses at this time. However, no horses will be allowed to enter or leave the facility over the next 30 days to assure the other horses remain healthy and are not contagious.

What is the situation now?

The Jackson Mountains horses are stabilizing and beginning to eat better and put on weight. The number of deaths has sharply declined, however, another 30-40 horses may die over the next 30 days. BLM is developing a safety plan for employees at the facility. PVC will be closed to the general public.

What are we doing at the facility to prevent healthy horses from getting sick?

The Jackson horses are being kept in separate pens from non-Jackson horses. Animal handling is only being done when absolutely necessary to minimize stress levels. Sufficient hay and water are being provided to get the horses gaining weight and in better condition.

Animal movement within the facility is being kept to a minimum and traffic patterns have been adjusted to minimize the spread of dirt, manure and bacteria from the more heavily affected pens to the unaffected pens. Vehicles are being cleaned and disinfected after they move through the most affected pens and personnel are taking biosafety precautions (dedicated or protective clothing, boot and hand washing stations).

JACKSON MOUNTAINS GATHER

When did BLM gather the Jackson Mountains HMA?

The Jackson Mountains HMA was gathered during August 28-September 11, 2007. During the 15 day gather, 1,064 wild horses were captured and 990 horses were removed. Of these, 983 were shipped to the Palomino Valley Center for preparation for adoption or sale or long term holding. (7 died/were euthanized on site because of very poor condition or deformities.)

Why did so many wild horses need to be removed?

The Jackson Mountains Herd Management Area was last gathered in January 2003 when 661 horses were removed. Following the January 2003 gather, an estimated 215 wild horses remained on the range. Based on an estimated 15 percent per year annual growth rate, BLM projected a population of 377 wild horses.

However, aerial census conducted June 21, 2007 estimated the population of wild horses within the Jackson Mountains HMA at 1,017 animals, nearly 8 times the low Appropriate Management Level for wild horses within this HMA.

This information indicates that nearly twice as many animals remained as estimated following the 2003 gather and that the actual annual growth rate averaged about 20 percent per year over the past four year period instead of the 15 percent per year previously estimated.

Did resource conditions indicate a wild horse population greater than BLM's estimate?

Yes. Resource monitoring data indicated the overpopulation of wild horses was resulting in excessive utilization at key forage sites and that excess trampling by wild horses in key areas was impacting range conditions and preventing recovery of key sites. 2007 monitoring also indicated a shortage of water in the southern portions of the HMA.

If the horses were in such poor shape, why wasn't the Jackson Mountains HMA gathered sooner?

BLM considered removing the horses in July but a gather contractor was not available nor was there adequate facility space. Additionally, the Jackson Mountains wild horses were monitored at least once weekly throughout the summer to assure they had adequate water and remained in acceptable body condition. However, in the week to ten days prior to the gather, animal condition sharply declined – a situation which could not have been foreseen based on weekly monitoring of food, water and animal conditions.

What was the primary capture method?

The helicopter drive trapping method was the primary means used to capture the wild horses.

Why wasn't bait or water trapping considered since it would have been less stressful to the animals?

Because animal condition declined sharply in the week to ten days prior to the gather, the animals needed to be gathered as efficiently and effectively as possible to prevent their death on the range. The deaths of wild horses at the Palomino Valley Center are not related to the gather itself, nor are they a function of the gather method. The deaths stem from their difficulty in adapting to their new environment --- a change in their diet from mainly brush to hay.

Why did the BLM put the wild horses at great risk by removing them?

If the horses had been left on the range, a far greater number would have died over the winter due to lack of food and water.

What is the condition of the 131 wild horses remaining on the range?

By removing the excess animals, remaining horses are experiencing significantly less competition for the available food and water. These horses are in good body condition. Springs are effectively recharging because of the reduced demand created by the overpopulation.

JACKSON MOUNTAINS HERD MANAGEMENT AREA

Where is the Jackson Mountains HMA located?

The Jackson Mountains HMA is 60 miles northwest of Winnemucca, Nevada. The area is about 283,000 acres in size, with 274,511 acres of public lands and 8,490 acres of private land.

What is the appropriate management level for the Jackson Mountains HMA?

The appropriate management level is set as a range of 130-217 wild horses through Final Multiple Use Decision's for the Bottle Creek, Deer Creek, Happy Creek, Jackson Mountains, and Wilder-Quinn Allotments and in EA No. NV-020-02-31.

What is the estimated number of wild horses remaining post-gather?

An estimated 131 wild horses remain post-gather. Included were 72 wild horses released back to the range following the gather and 59 animals not captured. Of the 72 wild horses released post-gather, 36 were mares treated with fertility control to slow population growth over the next 1-4 year period.

Did BLM make any adjustments in domestic livestock use in the Jackson Mountains to reduce competition for the available food and water?

The Winnemucca Field Office sent a letter to permittees on allotments in the herd area in June advising them they may need to adjust their livestock management because of drought conditions. It was noted in the letter that if drought conditions continued to worsen, permittees could be required to remove cattle from their allotment early. The BLM didn't make adjustments, however, some of the permittees reduced the number of livestock and then removed all of them earlier than the permitted off date.

Does the Nevada have any gathers planned that will be affected by the closure at the Palomino Valley Center?

Nevada's next gather is scheduled for Nov. 1 in the New Pass/Ravenswood and Augusta Mountains herd management areas in the Battle Mountain and Winnemucca field office areas.

This gather is necessary because of loss of habitat from wildland fire. We expect to remove about 730 animals from these two herd areas. The gather hasn't been cancelled, but we are working on sorting out how to proceed.

Are there any concerns for the public water supply?

No

Are we seeing similar drought-related impacts/conditions in animals in other herd areas?

BLM WHB specialists have been closely monitoring animal and resource conditions in herd areas throughout Nevada, which will continue throughout the winter.