

Jackson Mountain EA Draft Research

Notes from Happy Creek EA Grazing Allotment in Jackson Mt. HMA
EA NV-020-07-EA-07

Table 1. Grazing Permit under Proposed Action

Livestock Number	Livestock Kind	Begin Date	End Date	% Public Land	Type Use	AUMs
500	Cattle	04/01	08/30	100	Active*	2499
272	Cattle	10/15	02/28	100	Active*	1225
Total AUMs						3724
*Portion of the grazing preference that is available for livestock use under a permit or lease based on livestock carrying capacity and resource conditions in an allotment and not in suspension						

Table 2. Grazing System under Proposed Action

Pasture	Year 1	Year 2
Upper Happy Creek	REST until PFC is met*	REST until PFC is met*
South of Highway	500 cows 4/1-8/30	272 cows 10/15-2/28
North of Highway	272 cows 10/15-2/28	500 cows 4/1-8/30

Manage, maintain and improve public rangeland conditions to provide forage on a sustained yield basis for big game, with an initial forage demand of 262 AUMs for mule deer and 38 AUMs for bighorn sheep.

- 1 2. Manage, maintain and improve public rangeland conditions to provide forage on a sustained yield basis for livestock, with an initial stocking level of 3724 AUMs.

Table 4. Grazing System under Alternative 2

Pasture	
Upper Happy Creek	150 cows 05/15-07/15
South of Highway	500 cows 4/1-5/14
“	350 cows 5/15-7/15
“	500 cows 7/16-8/30
North of Highway	272 cows 10/15-2/28

The Happy Creek Allotment would continue to be managed under the allotment specific objectives as outlined in the Happy Creek FMUD issued February 14, 1997.

a. Improve to and maintain 5,341 acres of Jackson Mountains DS-8 in good or excellent mule deer habitat condition and 756 acres of Quinn River DY-6, 6,637 acres of Bilk Creek DY-9, and 16,391 acres of Jackson Mountain DY-18 in fair to excellent habitat condition.

b. Improve to and maintain 5,792 acres of Jackson Mountain BY-6 in good to excellent bighorn sheep habitat condition.

c. Improve to and maintain 3,419 acres of Buff Peak PS-12, 9,204 acres of Bilk Creek PW-14, and 18,326 acres of Jackson Mountain PY-13 ranges in good to excellent pronghorn habitat condition.

2. Manage, maintain and improve public rangeland conditions to provide forage on a sustained yield basis for livestock, with an initial stocking level of 3724 AUMs.

Jackson Mountain Livestock Numbers 2007

<u>Permittee</u>	<u>Allotment #</u>	<u>Livestock</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Begin Date</u>	<u>End Date</u>
Jackson Mtn 4,045	58	Cattle	100	1-Mar	15-Mar
		Cattle	363	16-Mar	31-Mar
		Cattle	750	1-Apr	30-Apr
		Cattle	1,750	1-May	15-Aug
		Cattle	702	16-Aug	30-Sep
		Cattle	202	1-Oct	31-Oct
		Cattle	155	1-Nov	28-Feb
		Cattle	23	1-Nov	30-Nov
Deer Creek 94	55	Cattle	94	1-Mar	31-Mar
		Cattle	94	1-Apr	31-Jul
		Cattle	94	1-Oct	31-Dec
Bottle Creek 814	66	Cattle	100	1-Sep	8-Nov
		Cattle	100	1-Apr	30-Jun
		Cattle	175	1-Jun	15-Aug
		Cattle	231	1-Nov	31-Jan
		Cattle	208	1-Apr	15-Dec
Desert Valley 579	59	Cattle	70	1-Sep	30-Sep
		Cattle	70	16-Oct	30-Nov
		Cattle	29	1-Dec	27-Dec
		Cattle	286	1-Apr	15-Aug
		Cattle	121	16-Aug	31-Aug
		Cattle	39	1-Sep	30-Sep

		Cattle	27	16-Oct	30-Nov
		Cattle	7	1-Dec	27-Dec
Wilder-Quinn	47				
Cattle= 1,894		Cattle	200	1-Mar	15-Sep
(1,460 Year Round)		Cattle	200	1-Nov	28-Feb
Sheep= 482		Cattle	1,460	1-Mar	31-Aug
		Cattle	1,460	1-Nov	31-Dec
		Cattle	1,460	1-Feb	28-Feb
		Cattle	34	1-Dec	28-Feb
		Sheep	482	1-Apr	20-May
		Sheep	482	1-Jun	10-Sep

Permittee Allotment # Livestock Number Begin Date End Date

Happy Creek	56				
Cattle= 1,772		Cattle	500	1-Apr	14-May
		Cattle	350	15-May	15-Jun
		Cattle	500	16-Jul	30-Aug
		Cattle	150	15-May	15-Jul
		Cattle	272	15-Oct	28-Feb

Total Cattle= 7,426

Total Sheep= 482

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The Happy Creek allotment is in the Quinn River drainage basin, on the northern end of the Jackson Mountains. Known water resources within the allotment include 73 springs, 25 seeps, 2 wells, and one perennial stream (Happy Creek). Happy Creek has been partially excluded from livestock use via a riparian exclosure.

Priority species for the allotment include neo-tropical migrant birds, greater sage-grouse, and mule deer, pronghorn antelope, and bighorn sheep. Migrant birds are considered in section 3.1.3 Migratory Birds, and greater sage-grouse are considered in section 3.2.3 Sensitive Species. There are many other wildlife species that occupy habitats within the allotment including raptors, predators, small mammals, reptiles and small game species. However, the priority species were chosen because of past consideration in BLM's planning process and knowledge about habitat needs and conditions and known potential impacts from livestock grazing.

Pronghorn Antelope - No reasonable numbers for pronghorn were set for this allotment in the Paradise-Denio Management Framework Plan. Pronghorn distribution on the allotment was not recognized in the Paradise-Denio Grazing Environmental Impact Statement. Pronghorn have expanded their range onto the Happy Creek Allotment since the EIS was completed in 1981.

California Bighorn Sheep - The Paradise-Denio Management Framework Plan set the reasonable numbers (AUMs) of bighorn sheep for this allotment at 38 AUMs along the higher elevations of the Jackson Range.

39,919 acres of the Happy Creek Allotment are located in the Jackson Mountain HMA (see map 10). The appropriate management level (AML) within this HMA for this allotment is 36-60 horses. This HMA's current population is estimated at 91 horses and is scheduled to be gathered in September of 2007, pending available funding. Wild horse removals were conducted in October 1997 (511 removed) and January 2003 (662 removed).

Competition for forage is expected to be low between livestock and wild horses because livestock tend to occupy different areas of the allotment than wild horses. Competition between wild horses, livestock, and wildlife would increase as equine numbers increase, and would decrease following wild horse removals.

South of the Highway East and South of the Highway West pastures livestock grazing would alternate April 1 to June 30 and July 1 to August 30. The North of the Highway pasture would be grazed October 15 to February 28, each year. Wild horses are present throughout most of the year in the south of the highway pasture both east and west, if at or below AML, light or slight utilization levels are anticipated. Wild horses are not present in North of the highway pasture. This proposal would allow key plant species to complete their life cycle in the South of the Highway East and West pastures increasing plant vigor, cover, productivity and diversity. North of the Highway pasture livestock graze outside of the critical growth period. This season of use would

The proposed fence would create trails and ruts adjacent to the fence. Concentration of both livestock and wild horses adjacent to the fence would increase compaction when soils are moist increasing runoff and dust when soils are dry. The majority of the fence would be located on soils with a moderate wind erosion hazard potential and slight water erosion hazard potential. These impacts would be minor.

Alternative 1 would have negative effects on wild horses because of the proposed fence that would be built within the herd management area. This fence would inhibit the wild free-roaming nature of the horses in this Herd Management Area. Horses would no longer be able to migrate seasonally through this area. Horses may also become entangled in the fence, causing serious injury or death.

Under the No Livestock Grazing Alternative soil processes would be improved. Except in the following areas, where annual plant species dominate, these areas are expected to remain static. In areas where Sandberg bluegrass dominates the under story, nutrient cycling would remain static for many years, deep rooted perennial grasses would be slow to return or may not re-establish. Healthy vigorous perennial under story plants would increase in the long term, but annual species would increase in the short term, until vigorous root systems of the perennial plant increase reducing annual species establishment. Fire frequency is expected to increase in the short term. Soil biological crusts would increase when the improvement in the vegetation conditions occurs.

concentrated development. The primary impact has been the generation of sediment and erosion from ground disturbing activities (grazing, transportation, recreation etc.). Impacts from livestock grazing have been the most prevalent due to their tendency to loiter in riparian areas resulting in channel instability. Impacts (punching, erosion, and nutrient enrichment) from wild horses are also evident at some isolated springs due to

their concentrated use. The extent of these impacts is localized due to the dispersed nature of all of the activities.

Proposed Action (Past + Present + RFFA + Proposed Action)

Due to the ability of the proposed action to meet the Standards of Rangeland Health, the expected cumulative impact to water resources would be a slight decrease in sedimentation which may not actually be realized due to the predicted increase in OHV related disturbance.

This alternative would allow for riparian areas (and the associated water quality) to approach their natural potential, where wild horses are not present. It is likely that the water quality of Happy Creek would improve and that many of the isolated springs would remain static due to wild horse use. Impacts associated with the anticipated increase in OHV use would still be realized.

Current Population - 377
2/2007 314 + 20% (62)= 376

Table 1 makes the ridiculous assertion that growth rate will be 24.5% without fertility control even though the estimated population has been 20%

Table 2. Management Range for Wild Horses

Allotment	Management Range
Bottle Creek	12 to 20 head
Deer Creek	6 to 10 head
Desert Valley	0 head
Happy Creek	36 to 60 head
Jackson Mountains	70 to 117 head
Wilder-Quinn	6 to 10 head
Total	130 to 217 head

Water or bait trapping was considered but eliminated from further analysis due to the low probability that bait trapping would be effective in the area because the available natural water and forage sources. Bait or water trapping was also eliminated due to the inefficiency in gathering 300-400 wild horses in this manner.

3.1.5 Riparian areas are scattered throughout the Jackson Mountains and are generally associated with perennial streams that include; Bottle Creek, Deer Creek, Happy Creek, Jackson Creek, and Trout Creek. There are numerous springs and seeps found throughout the area (see map 2). Severe resource degradation caused by wild horses is currently occurring at some springs within the HMA.

Table 5. Number of Wild Horses Gathered and Removed

Year	Number Gathered	Number Removed
1989	225	225
1994	447	313
1997	671	511
2003	715	661

Table 6. AML and July 2007 Population Summary

Table 6. AML and July 2007 Population Summary for the Jackson Mountains HMA

	AML	Population Estimate
Jackson Mountains	117	210
Deer Creek	10	10
Happy Creek	36-60	109
Bottle Creek	12-20	26
Desert Valley	0	0
Wilder-Quinn	10	11
Total	130-217	366

4.3.10 Wild Horses

The current population of 366 wild horses would continue to increase, and exceed the carrying capacity of the range. Though it may require many years for the population to reach catastrophic levels, by exceeding the upper limit of the management range, alternative 3 poses the greatest risk to the long-term health of the Jackson Mountains HMA wild horse population, wildlife populations, and the vegetative resources.

This alternative would not be acceptable to the BLM nor most members of the public. The BLM recognizes that some members of the public advocate “letting nature take its course”, however allowing horses to die of dehydration and starvation would be inhumane treatment and would clearly indicate that an overpopulation of wild horses existed in the HMA. The Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971, as amended, mandates the Bureau to “*prevent the range from deterioration associated with overpopulation*”, and “*remove excess horses in order to preserve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationships in that area*”. Additionally, Promulgated Federal Regulations at Title 43 CFR 4700.0-6 (a) state “*Wild horses shall be managed as*

self-sustaining populations of healthy animals in balance with other uses and the productive capacity of their habitat”. (emphasis added).

5.3.8.3 Cumulative Impact

Proposed Action

Wilderness restoration efforts combined with improved livestock management practices would continue to improve conditions of naturalness within the cumulative assessment area. The proposed action would create the least impacts to naturalness and solitude in the area by removing the greatest number of horses and using fertility control to reduce the occurrence of future gather operations.

5.3.7.2 Impacts from Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions

Gathers that would occur on a 4 year cycle after the 2007 gather should result in management objectives for both livestock and wild horses to be met based on current management objectives that are in place.

The BLM is also working to fully process the grazing permits for many allotments by 2009 as required by Congress. Permits on grazing allotments located within the Jackson Mountain HMA fall into this category. As a result the BLM will be working on EA's for the renewal of these livestock grazing permits within the reasonably foreseeable future. The impacts from the grazing permit renewals are expected to be minor.

5.3.8 Special Status Species

5.3.8.1 Impacts from Past and Present Actions

Past actions have resulted in displacement due to habitat loss. Wildfires have destroyed areas of native habitat that were once available to Special Status Species.

5.3.8.2 Impacts from Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions

Impacts from past actions are not expected to increase. Further loss of native habitat to wildfires is the main concern.

5.3.8.3 Cumulative Impact

Proposed Action

Although there is expected increases in recreation and wild fires there would be an improvement from the Proposed Action.

5.3.9.3 Cumulative Impact

Proposed Action

Although there is expected increases in recreation and wild fires, implementation of the proposed action along with a consistent 4 year wild horse gather cycle would result in the overall improvement of the ecological condition of the assessment area and benefit the health of the herd.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2

Although there is expected increases in recreation and wild fires, implementation of alternative 2 along with a consistent 4 year wild horse gather cycle, would improve the ecological condition of the assessment area to a slightly lesser degree than the proposed action and benefit the health of the herd.

Alternative 3: No Action Alternative

Implementation of the no action alternative would result in overpopulation of the analysis area that would lead to drastically reduced forage availability for wild horses in the analysis area. Eventually, along with the past, present, and reasonable foreseeable future actions the health of the herd would decline.

Fifty-one individuals, groups and agencies on the Wilderness interested public list were notified of the proposed action by letter dated March 22, 2007, requesting any concerns, data or information BLM should consider in preparing the preliminary EA.

Additionally, this Gather Plan and Environmental Assessment is being

According to the population Modeling, 23.4% with fertility control in the highest trial.

Without fertility control, highest % is 30.6

(In 1% of the trails the minimum population size in 11 yrs was < 130. Average population size in 11 yrs ranges from 224 to 410.)

Population Sizes in 11 Years*

	Minimum	Average	Maximum
Lowest Trial	366	668	950
10th Percentile	372	1229	2385
25th Percentile	378	1394	2710
Median Trial	391	1597	3372
75th Percentile	409	1804	3812
90th Percentile	440	1883	4254
Highest Trial	521	2230	5269

* 0 to 20+ year-old horses

(In 0% of the trails the minimum population size

in 11 yrs was < 130. Average population size
in 11 yrs ranges from 668 to 2230.)
Average Growth Rate in 10 Years
Lowest Trial 8.5
10th Percentile 19.2
25th Percentile 21.3
Median Trial 23.8
75th Percentile 25.2
90th Percentile 26.1
Highest Trial 29.2

Anybody want to explain why the population was logged in at 521 for the highest trial?

Minumum tool- helicopter removals? Does not meet the requirement of minimum tool.

4. Can this project or activity be accomplished outside of wilderness and still achieve its objective? (i.e. such as some group events)

No. Conducting the horse gather outside of wilderness could possibly allow BLM to reach AML in the overall Herd Management Area (HMA), but it would not reduce the impacts that wild horses are having on the Wilderness Areas. The temporary corrals/traps however would be located outside of the wilderness area boundaries.

5. Is the project or activity subject to valid existing rights?

No. Valid existing rights are not associated with the action.

If No> Go to question 6

No. Valid existing rights are not associated with the action.

6. Is there special provisions in legislation (the Wilderness Act of 1964 or the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails NCA Act of 2000) that allows this project or activity? (i.e. signing, visitor education, or information)

No. There are no special provisions dealing with wild horses in the legislation.

1. How does this project/activity benefit the wilderness as a whole as opposed to one resource?

The objective of the proposed action is to remove excess wild horses from the Jackson Mountains HMA, which includes portions of three designated wilderness areas. Excess wild horses can have a negative impact to the naturalness of the wilderness areas, by competing with the areas native wildlife populations, overgrazing riparian areas, and trampling springs. The proposed action would maintain and enhance the naturalness of the wilderness areas by removing the excess horses and the impacts they are having on the naturalness of the area.

6. How did you consider wilderness values over convenience, comfort, political, economic or commercial values while evaluating this project/activity?

The purpose of the proposed action is to enhance the naturalness of the wilderness areas by removing excess wild horses, and alleviating the impacts that they are having on the naturalness of the areas.

Alt#1. Remove excess wild horses from the Jackson Mountains HMA.
Wild horses would be gathered using the helicopter drive trapping and/or helicopter roping capture methods. This would require low level helicopter flights over the involved wilderness areas.
The action is being proposed in this manner because it is the most humane and successful method to gather wild horses from the type of terrain found in the wilderness areas

Alt#2
Solitude would be impacted for the duration of the gather. This alternative would have the least impact on solitude and the wilderness experience. The use of wranglers on horseback to herd wild horses to traps would be less intrusive and would only impact the immediate area. The impact will be temporary in nature, however it would be longer in duration than alternative #1.

Societal/Political Effects

- 1 • *Describe any political considerations, such as MOU's, agency agreements, local positions that may be affected by the proposed action.*
- 2 • *Describe relationship of method to applicable laws.*

Alt#1
 BLM has made commitments to remove excess wild horses to achieve AML in the Jackson Mountains HMA.
 Wilderness groups have commented in favor of the project.
 BLM wilderness policy and the Resource Management Plan provides for the use of motorized and mechanized equipment, including aircraft use to remove wild horses and burros when no other alternative exists

Economic and Timing Considerations

- 1 • Describe the costs and timing associated with implementing each alternative.
- 2 • Assess the urgency and potential cumulative effect from this proposal and similar actions.

<p>Alt#1 This alternative would greatly decrease the amount of time that would be required for the project because wild horses could be located quickly and then immediately herded to the trap site(s).</p>	<p>Alt#2 This alternative would take a much longer time to accomplish the goal of achieving AML. The wild horses would have to be located and then herded by the wranglers, which would take a considerable amount of time.</p>	<p>Alt#3 This alternative would also take much more time to achieve AML than alternative #1. Because the traps would only hold small numbers of wild horses, it would potentially take months to reach AML in the HMA.</p>
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Formulate a preferred alternative from the above alternatives and describe in detail below
 The preferred alternative is Alternative #1. This alternative would allow BLM to effectively achieve AML in the area while minimizing the impacts to solitude and primitive recreation by decreasing the amount of time that will be required to complete the gather. A helicopter will be used to herd the horses to trap sites located outside of wilderness. No landing of aircraft will occur other than for emergency purposes, and no motorized vehicles would be used in the wilderness areas.

Further refine the alternative to minimize impacts to wilderness

<p>What will be the specific operating requirements?</p>	<p>All trap sites will be located outside of wilderness. No motorized vehicles will be used inside wilderness. No landing of aircraft will occur except in the case of an emergency.</p>
<p>What are the maintenance requirements?</p>	<p>No maintenance is foreseen.</p>
<p>What standards and designs will apply?</p>	<p>The standard operating procedures found in the EA will be used.</p>

Develop and describe any mitigation measures that apply.	Gather activities will avoid weekends or holidays to minimize the likelihood of impacting wilderness visitors.
What provisions have been made for monitoring and feed back to strengthen future efforts and/or prevent the need for recurring future actions?	A diary detailing all activities related to the gather will be completed daily. BLM personnel administering the gather contract will maintain an open line of communications with the wilderness management team.

