Horses and Burros: Overview

The majority of wild horses and burros on public land reside on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands.

There are 177 HMAs on BLM land, amounting to 31.6 million acres.

BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program Expenditures in Fiscal Year 2016

- Off-Range Holding Costs: 63.1%
- Gathers and Removals: 3.9%
- Adoptions: 9.4%
- Other Activities: 23.5%

Wild Horse and Burro Populations Estimated on BLM Lands

- 140,000 estimated in 2021
- 73,000 in 2017
- Populations double every 4-5 years
- 25,000 in 1971
- Appropriate Management Level: 27,000

Herd Management Areas (HMA) are areas currently managed for wild horses and burros. HMAs are based on where viable populations of horses and burros roamed in 1971.

BLM scientists establish Approropriate Management Levels (AML) for HMAs to promote healthy conditions & thriving ecological balance.

Over-population of horses can lead to a depletion of food and water resources. (Ostermann-Kelm 2009)

The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 directs U.S. federal agencies to manage wild herds to “maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship.”
Over the last 10 years, horse adoptions have declined by nearly 70%.

There are a total of 46,015 wild horses and burros living in BLM off-range holding facilities as of March 2017.
- 70% in off-range pastures
- 29% in off-range corrals
- 1% in eco-sanctuaries

In fiscal year 2016, 3,116 horses and burros were placed into private care, while on-range population grew by more than 6,000.
- 2,912 adoptions
- 204 sales

Due to the high cost of caring for animals, BLM is now only removing as many animals from the range as can be adopted, leaving more excess horses on the rangelands.

What about Fertility Control?
The current available fertility control vaccine (procine zona pellucida) is only effective for 22 months and must be hand-injected into a wild horse. A second formulation can be deployed via ground darting, but is only effective for one year. Alternative methods are being researched.

Since 2012, BLM has applied PZP to 2,574 horses.