



## United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Burns District Office  
28910 Hwy 20 West  
Hines, Oregon 97738  
<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/burns>



Dear Interested Party:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Burns District Office is beginning the process of writing an environmental assessment (DOI-BLM-ORWA-B050-2018-0016-EA) titled Spay Feasibility and On-Range Behavioral Outcomes Assessment and Warm Springs Herd Management Area (HMA) Population Management Plan. The EA would analyze the environmental effects of a proposed research project involving spaying (ovariectomy) wild horse mares and assessing their behavioral outcomes after collaring and returning them to the range with untreated horses.

The purpose of this letter is to provide interested parties an opportunity to participate in the development of this plan.

The proposed research study would take place in Warm Springs HMA (gather and behavior monitoring) and at the Oregon Wild Horse Corral Facility in Hines, Oregon (spay feasibility and collaring). Please see attached map for the location of Warm Springs HMA. In addition to the research study, this EA would incorporate a 10-year population management plan for the Warm Springs HMA. The BLM will analyze the anticipated effects of conducting the proposed research study as well as various population management actions (i.e. gathers, removals, population growth suppression) following the completion of the study to maintain appropriate management level (AML) over the 10-year timeframe of analysis.

The specific aims of the proposed study include:

- Determining the approximate stage of gestation of the mares presented for surgery to understand how gestational stage affects the surgical procedure and how the surgical procedure affects maintenance of pregnancy.
- Determining the feasibility of performing ovariectomies via colpotomy in wild horses in a BLM facility.
- Evaluating the immediate and short-term effects of the surgical procedure on wild mares.
- Measuring rates of social and reproductive behavior and group cohesion in free-roaming male and female wild horses evaluating individuals within and between treatment and control HMA segments and comparing their behavior.
- Recording any observable changes in mare health in both treatment and control herd segments to determine if this is affected by spay treatment.
- Determining spatial ecology of horses within treatment and control herd segments of the population by monitoring the GPS locations throughout the year.
- Measuring annual population size in both treated and untreated herd segments.

Based on monitoring data and following thorough public review, the AML for Warm Springs HMA was established in the Three Rivers Resource Management Plan (RMP)/Record of Decision (ROD) (September 1992) and Proposed RMP/ROD (September 1991) as a range of 111–202 animals, including 15–24 burros.

The BLM has determined that by the fall of 2018 there will be approximately 738 adult wild horses plus approximately 147 foals, with an additional estimate of about 49 adult burros plus foals residing in and outside of Warm Springs HMA. There is a need to protect rangeland resources from deterioration associated with populations which exceed AML, as well as a need to maintain a wild horse and burro population in balance with the four essential habitat components (forage, water, cover, and space), *especially water in this instance*, over the long term. The estimated population by fall 2018 includes approximately 585+ excess adult animals that should be removed from the HMA to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance, prevent degradation of the range, and minimize the need for emergency actions (specifically those associated with the availability of water). This assessment is based on the following factors including, but not limited to:

- A September 2016 aerial inventory using the simultaneous double-count method that estimated 513 adults horses plus 73 foals. By fall of 2018, with a 20 percent annual population growth rate, the wild horse population is estimated to be 738 adult horses plus 147 foals.
- The current burro population is estimated at 49 adults plus foals.
- By fall 2018, use by wild horses and burros would be exceeding the forage allocated to their use (2,424 animal unit months (AUMs)) by approximately 7,020 AUMs.
- During the Severe Drought (designated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) in 2014, wild horses and burros were forced to congregate closer to the few remaining water sources in the HMA. The BLM began hauling water to an existing water hole to save approximately 80 horses due to high potential for mortality. The estimated wild horse population at that time was 253 adults and 44 foals. The estimated fall 2018 population of 738 adult horses plus foals, 49 adult burros plus foals, and forecasted drought ([http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/long\\_range/lead01/off01\\_prcp.gif](http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/long_range/lead01/off01_prcp.gif)) only increase the risk for animal mortality due to lack of water and unchecked population growth.

The goals of this project are two-fold: (1) Study the feasibility of using spaying as a tool for wild horse population growth management, and (2) Return and maintain the wild horse and burro population within the established AML in Warm Springs HMA to prevent self-limitation due to lack of available water, protect rangeland resources from deterioration associated with overpopulation, and restore a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship on public lands in the area consistent with the provisions of Section 1333(b) of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act (WFRHBA) of 1971.

Comments received from interested parties following receipt of this letter will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed research and wild horse and burro population management activities. Please provide information that you have on the status or condition of the resources or resource values of the proposed study and project area or alternatives to consider. Please submit all replies by June 4, 2018. For responses, comments, and/or any other information please contact Wild Horse and Burro Specialist Lisa Grant, Burns District Office, at the address above, or send an email to [blm\\_or\\_spaystudy\\_warmsprhma@blm.gov](mailto:blm_or_spaystudy_warmsprhma@blm.gov) or call 541-573-4555.

Sincerely,



Jeff Rose  
District Manager  
Burns District BLM

Enclosure



Map A: Spay Feasibility and On-Range Behavioral Outcome Assessment and Warm Springs HMA Population Management Plan

