



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Fifteenmile Wild Horse Gather Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Q. Why is this gather necessary?

A. The gather is necessary to return wild horse populations to the low range of the appropriate management level (AML) and ensure long-term viability of sage-grouse populations within the complex.

The BLM is tasked with effectively managing wild horses on healthy and productive public lands, in balance with other resources and uses. Excess animals cause undue pressure on limited rangeland resources. As wild horse and burro populations rise, there are serious consequences for the animals and the land. Horses may starve, dehydrate and wander onto private property or highways. Land health and habitat for sage-grouse and other wildlife may be compromised.

The BLM manages the nation's public lands for multiple uses (wild horses, wildlife habitat, livestock grazing, etc.), in accordance with the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act. Under the authority of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, the BLM manages, protects and controls wild horses and burros. This law requires the BLM to remove excess wild horses and burros from the range to sustain the health and productivity of public lands.

Q. How many horses will be gathered and how many will be removed from the range?

A. The BLM will gather approximately 700 horses and remove approximately 600 horses to return the population to the low range of the appropriate management level. This includes the removal of wild horses located outside of the established boundary of the Fifteenmile HMA.

Q. How many horses will be returned to the HMA?

A. A total of 100 select mares and stallions will be returned to the HMA to ensure genetic variability. Of the 100 horses that will be returned to the HMA, 60 will be male and 40 will be female, which will slow population growth.

Q. What is the current population estimate and appropriate management level?

A.

Herd Management Area	Appropriate Management Level	Est. total population (2019)
Fifteenmile	100-230	700

Q. Where will the removed horses go?

A. Excess wild horses removed from the HMA will initially be shipped to the BLM off-range corrals in Rock Springs, Wyoming, where they will be aged, dewormed, blood tested for Equine Infectious Anemia (known as EIA or Coggins Test), vaccinated, freeze marked and prepared for either the BLM's adoption program or long-term holding pastures in the Midwest.

Horses will be offered for adoption or purchase through the BLM's wild horse and burro adoption and sale programs, or placed in off-range pastures or private ranches open to the public. Some of the horses will be sent to the Wyoming Honor Farm or the Mantle Ranch Wild Horse Training Facility for gentling prior to adoption.

Q. How will this gather affect wildlife?

A. The removal of excess wild horses from public rangeland is carried out to maintain rangeland health. Excess animals cause undue pressure on limited rangeland resources. With overpopulation on the range, the risk to the animals due to forage and/or water starvation increases significantly each year. Wildlife benefit from the management of wild horses by balancing forage and water sources so all species utilizing public rangelands will be healthier.

Approximately one-half of the Fifteenmile HMA is composed of Greater Sage-Grouse priority habitat. Returning the wild horse population to within AML will help ensure long-term viability of sage-grouse populations within the area.

Q. Is the BLM removing horses to make room for more cattle grazing?

A. No. The removal of wild horses and burros from public rangelands is carried out to ensure rangeland health, in accordance with land-use plans that are developed in an open, public process. These land-use plans are the means by which BLM carries out its core mission, which is to manage the land for multiple uses while protecting the land's resources. Authorized livestock grazing on BLM-managed land has declined by nearly 50 percent since the 1940s; actual (as distinguished from authorized) livestock grazing on public rangelands has declined by 30 percent since 1971.

In the Fifteenmile HMA, nearly all of the grazing has been in voluntary non-use for several years. Currently, there is no direct competition for forage and water between wild horses and domestic livestock in the HMA, as very little livestock grazing has occurred in the HMA in recent years.

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when there are already 50,000 animals in holding?

A. The ecosystems of public rangelands are not able to withstand the impacts from overpopulated herds, which include soil erosion, sedimentation of streams and damage to wildlife habitat. As for the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, Section 1333 of that law mandates that once the Interior Secretary "determines...on the basis of all information currently available to him, that an overpopulation exists on a given area of the public lands and that action is necessary to remove excess animals, he shall immediately remove excess animals from the range so as to achieve appropriate management levels."

The current estimated on-range population is **88,090** animals—61,400 more than the range can sustainably support (26,690). Although the BLM tries to place as many removed animals as possible into private care through adoption or sales, the public's demand for wild horses cannot keep up.

Q. Why is BLM removing horses that appear to be or are in good condition?

A. The BLM gathers horses with different body conditions, including some that appear to be or are in good condition. The agency gathers excess animals from overpopulated herds to prevent worst-case scenarios in which removed horses would be emaciated because of insufficient forage on the range.

When a herd management area population is within its appropriate management level, healthy and viable wild horses are able to survive and thrive during severe winters or drought.

Habitat conditions in the Fifteenmile HMA, particularly water availability, will soon be insufficient to support the growing wild horse population. The BLM needs to plan for periods of drought. We don't want to find ourselves in the position where there is not enough water or forage available to support this burgeoning wild horse population, as well as the wildlife and livestock in the HMA.

Q. What happens to horses that are not adopted?

A. Unadopted horses are fed and cared for in short-term corrals, long-term Midwestern pastures or wild horse eco-sanctuaries. Wild horses more than 10 years old and those passed over for adoption at least three times become eligible for sale, a transaction in which the title of ownership to the animal passes immediately from the Federal government to the buyer. (In the adoption process, the title of ownership passes from the Federal government to the adopter after the individual provides one year of humane care.) All horses in holding retain their status as "wild" animals and remain under the BLM's protection.

Q. Will any of the horses be sent to slaughter?

A. No. The Bureau has not been and is not selling wild horses to slaughterhouses or to "kill buyers."

Q. What veterinary treatment will the removed horses receive?

A. The horses will be aged (based on the condition of their teeth), de-wormed, vaccinated, blood-tested, and freeze marked (marked with a cold brand). During the gather, an animal and plant inspection service (APHIS) veterinarian will be on-site to examine animals and make recommendations to BLM for care and treatment of wild horses.

Q. How far, in relation to the trap site, are the horses being herded?

A. The BLM strives to minimize the distance wild horses must be herded. Under normal circumstances this travel should not exceed 10 miles and may be much less depending on the location of the horses when the gather is underway.

Q. Why does BLM use helicopters to gather horses?

A. Agencies were granted the authority to use helicopters with the passage of FLPMA in 1976 with the assumption that gathers could be conducted more efficiently and effectively. But more importantly today, the use of helicopters has proven to be more humane than other types of gather methods when large numbers of animals need to be removed over wide areas or rugged terrain. Helicopters are able to move horses and burros at a proper pace; moreover, helicopter pilots can keep mares and foals together better than a horseback rider and can also better move the animals around such barriers as deep ravines, fences or roads.

Q. Why doesn't the BLM use more fertility control?

A. The National Academy of Sciences found that no highly effective fertility-control methods are currently available. Research is being conducted by scientists from universities, state agencies, non-governmental organizations and the U.S. Geological Survey in cooperation with the BLM. At the same time, the BLM is using existing short-lasting contraceptives to slow population growth where possible.

Q. Will BLM spay mares or geld stallions in the future?

A. The BLM is trying to find alternative ways to keep horse populations within the AML and will continue to explore these topics. In 2015, the BLM began investing in research to find safe and effective methods to neuter and spay wild horses and develop longer-lasting contraceptive vaccines.

Q. How many wild horses are in Wyoming?

A. BLM Wyoming has 16 HMAs statewide and a total AML range of 2,490 to 3,725 wild horses. The FY19 Wild Horse and Burro Public Lands Statistics for Wyoming shows the population estimate as of March 1 to be approximately 7,836 wild horses.

Q. Will there be any public viewing opportunities at the trap sites?

A. Yes, public viewing of gather operations are available on public land. To view the gather, you must contact Sarah Beckwith, public affairs specialist, at sbeckwith@blm.gov to have your name listed on the daily visitor's log. Those on the daily visitors log will be informed where and when to meet each morning to be escorted to the designated observation site. This will allow appropriate staffing for public viewing needs, and also allow visitors instant notification if a trap site needs to be moved, or gather operations suspended due to weather or logistics.

Q. Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?

A. Please visit the BLM's Website at www.blm.gov/whb.