

National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board
October 2022

Recommendations:

We believe the BLM and the USDAFS should educate Congress about the complexities and budgetary limitations of the Wild Horse and Burro Program. To that end, we recommend the following:

Bureau of Land Management/Forest Service Structure and Collaboration

1. The BLM and FS should centralize the WHB Programs and institute organizational changes that would increase their program effectiveness:
 - a. The Advisory Board recommends that BLM and USFS provide operational responsibility specific to the Wild Horse and Burro Program in a manner that allows for increased operational control from headquarters, making it a priority to address national, state and district coordination efforts so that opportunities for better coordinated, mission-aligned plans can be implemented (e.g., follow the Forest Service fire management model when the need for emergency gathers arises).
 - b. There is a strong need to address long-term budgeting of Wild Horse and Burro programs in order to provide continuity for long-term planning. For example, creation of a centrally administered, separate budget for emergency gathers, which now occur annually, could help states implement strategic gathers that involve removals coupled with application of contraception prior to release.
 - c. Funding for the USFS to similarly manage their wild horse and burro populations should also be established.

Humane Handling and Communication

2. In an effort to obtain clear, consistent, and useful information that agencies can utilize for investigations, the board recommends that the BLM and FS develop a definitive reporting process for the public to report potential animal welfare or adoption violations. The process should include a well-publicized, easy-to-find online form with detailed questions to help clarify the nature of the complaint or observation (e.g., category of complaint and perceived violation, time and location, observations made, ability to upload photographic or video evidence, list of witnesses, personal contact information for follow-up as needed). Responses or timely updates should be provided in a transparent fashion to the original reporter and to the public in general. Data gathered through this system should be stored in a database (without personal contact details) to more efficiently track the nature of complaints, observe trends, and better address challenges that emerge.
3. Board recommends that the BLM continues to investigate vouchers as incentives for the Adoption Incentive Program (AIP); adoption and/or online sale criteria should be amended to include adopters' experience with equines, their intent in adopting/purchasing (performance, trail, pet); require that AIP adopters demonstrate that their animals have been gentled (can be approached, haltered, led, tied, and pick up feet at a minimum) before receiving title; and

quickly respond to the stakeholder group suggestions and concerns expressed during May and June 2022 facilitated meetings.

4. Many experienced and responsible community resources have indicated a strong interest to work with BLM and FS in the best interest of wild horses and burros. The board recommends that the BLM and FS investigate an agency avenue to build local partnerships/coalitions to support wild horse and burro care, ensure compliance and provide post adoption support. These efforts should include:
 - a. Establishing a community of successful adopters to share knowledge and resources (this could be online);
 - b. Partnering with organizations that already train horses (e.g., university equine programs, Mustang Heritage Foundation, wild horse and burro advocacy organizations);
 - c. Reviewing the inspection process and requirements;
 - d. Identify someone who can provide programmatic support for these activities.

Ecology Subcommittee

5. The board recommends that the BLM and USFS work with United States Geological Survey scientists to identify HMAs and Territories that will provide a statistically meaningful sample with which to test and validate the PopEquus model, under a diversity of field conditions, and that efforts begin immediately.
6. Measurable objectives outlining targeted fertility control and multi-year plans for individual HMAs or territories must be developed as robust and meaningful portions of all gather plans. Safe and humane fertility control treatments must be combined with every gather operation, whether or not AML is immediately achieved. This strategy will implement some measure of fertility control immediately and disrupt the cycle of repeat removals and long-term holding.