

**National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Meeting
Tallahassee, Florida
May 23, 2005**

Board Members present: Robin Lohnes, Gary Zakotnik, Hilleary Bogley, Dr. Vernon Dooley, Bill Higham, Dr. Joseph Merriam, and Dr. Wayne Burkhardt. Board Members absent: Renee Taylor and Larry Johnson. Washington Office and BLM Staff: Tom Dyer, DAD, Renewable Resources and Planning, Jeff Rawson, Sally Spencer, Dean Bolstad and Sharon Kipping. Ann Aldrich, Associate State Director of Eastern States, and USDA, Forest Service Representative: Ralph Giffen.

Robin Lohnes started the meeting at 8:05 a.m.

Ann Aldrich welcomed the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board to the Eastern States and the State of Florida. She commented that there were many changes taking place within the Eastern States organization including restructuring of personnel. Ann noted that Eastern States was working to improve their use of volunteers by building a pro-active volunteer network. She also talked about holding a meeting in the East to include humane organizations, past adopters and others interested in adoptions of animals in the East in FY 05. Ann also extended an invitation to the Board to attend the upcoming adoption in Lorton, Virginia, June 4, 2005.

Tom Dyer gave a brief overview of the sale authority. Tom said he was proud of the work that the BLM has done in their efforts to find good homes for the horses. Tom listed the steps that were being taken by BLM - putting a hold on the process of selling animals until a review of the sale procedures could be completed; strengthening the bill of sale; working with the processing plants to not accept these animals and developing the Save The Mustangs Fund with Ford Motor Company with the assistance of Take Pride In America. Tom mentioned that BLM had received a petition for rule making that is presently being reviewed.

March 2005 Minutes

The March 14, 2005 minutes were approved.

BLM Actions on March Recommendations

1. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board acknowledges sale authority and compliments the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for its efforts in implementation; the Board recommends the BLM stay on course and incorporate sale authority to ensure its implementation is not at the expense of the rest of the Wild Horse and Burro Program.

BLM Response

BLM remains committed to all elements of the wild horse and burro program, and has centrally administered the sales program from the Washington Office to minimize the workload impacts on field offices.

2. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends BLM pilot the proposed amended selective removal policy during the gathers from July 1, 2005 through February 28, 2006. The pilot should include gathering and analyzing data as to the effectiveness of the effort and adjusting the policy as necessary. BLM should conduct a preliminary analysis at the end of the fiscal year and adjust the policy as appropriate.

BLM Response

Since the March 14, 2005 Board meeting the proposed policy changes have been reviewed by state wild horse and burro leads. These specialists proposed one modification that provides for most 15 years and older horses to remain on the range. A draft instruction memorandum will be circulated for a full field review prior to implementation.

Discussion of the Issue:

Existing policy emphasizes the removal in priority order of first, 5 years and younger animals; second, 10 years and older; and third, removal of 6 to 9 year olds when necessary to achieve AML.

Policy changes presented to the Board provided that 6 years and younger animals would be removed first, 7 to 19 year olds second and that 20 years and older would be left on the range. Additionally, it was presented that some representatives of all age classes would be left on the range. The principle goal of these changes is to continue assurance of healthy sustainable herds on the range and emphasize removal of younger animals.

It is important that the new policy will provide for a diverse age structure on the range and considers the effects of past selective removal policies and the future effects of fertility control treatments.

As we approach achievement of AML in all herd management areas and begin maintenance gathers, BLM expects that removals will be primarily younger animals that are more readily adoptable. Some of the gathers scheduled for the remainder of 2005 and in the beginning of 2006 are however, in HMAs where numbers exceed AML and may require removal of animals beyond the youngest age classes.

3. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommended changes in the proposed Wild Horse and Burro Reduced Adoption Fee Schedule memo to only reflect the Buddy System (see the attachment).

BLM Response

The Board expressed concern that the term “reduced adoption fee” implies that the animal has limited value and may not be worthy of proper care.

BLM reviewed the issue with key staff specialists and has revised the proposed policy. The new policy re-defines the Buddy Program, introduces a new “Previous Adopter Reward” program, includes the Promotion horse program, and provides for special circumstances.

The Buddy and Previous Adopter Reward programs are designed to reward existing and returning adopter customers through lower adoption fees. The “customer appreciation” and companion animal concepts provide positive opportunities for marketing certain animals and the adoption program.

Placement of buddies will reduce haul back transportation from satellite adoption events and feed costs. The Previous Adopter Reward program will offer 4 to 10 year old animals to returning customers who understand the adoption program and have experience with animal care and gentling. This experience reduces the risk of improper care or inability to handle or train the animal.

BLM is drafting an instruction memorandum that will implement the following guidance for use of these programs:

1. **Buddy Program:** Qualified adopters who have adopted one or more full fee (\$125 or greater adoption fee) animals at a satellite adoption event are eligible at that event to adopt buddies at a \$25 adoption fee. Only ungentle horses not selected during the initial offering will be available as buddies; burros are not included in the buddy program. One buddy horse may be selected per full fee animal adopted. Mandatory compliance checks are required.
2. **Previous Adopter Reward Program:** Previous adopters who have titled an animal may be invited to special events or promotions where ungentle (not trained) four to ten year old horses will be offered for an adoption fee as low as \$25. The special event or promotion may be a satellite adoption or held at preparation and short term holding facilities. Mandatory compliance checks are required.
3. **Promotion Animal Program:** Horses and burros may be offered to organizations for adoption fees as low as \$25 when the adoption of the animal will generate positive recognition and advertisement of the adoption program.
4. **Special Circumstances:** Animals that have been offered unsuccessfully at two previous adoption events or that have special needs may be offered for adoption fees as low as \$25.

Update Pending Litigation

No new litigation.

Discussion on FY05 Gathers

BLM presented the FY05 gather schedule which was completed in consensus with the State Program Leads. A discussion followed and it was noted that gather numbers were changed from 9,810 animals up to 10,335 animals for FY05, pending review by the Steering Committee.

The Board observed that planned gather numbers are greater than planned adoption numbers, and that \$200,000 is being spent on additional removals and will not be used for census and habitat monitoring.

BLM responded that both, the 2001 and the current strategy to achieve AML, involves removing more animals annually than there is an adoption demand for until AML is attained. The goal is to achieve AML quickly, therefore lowering the total animal numbers that will need to be removed in the future, and reduce future costs. Several Board members acknowledge that money spent now on greater numbers of removals to achieve AML now would result in less money needed to gather more animals in the future.

Conducting census was also discussed. Dean stated that 25 to 30 percent of the HMAs have been censused annually. The Board requested a report on the status of the number of censuses completed to date for FY05.

FY05 Adoptions

BLM updated the Board on FY05 adoptions. Adoptions are down slightly this year compared to last year. Two reasons may be: (1) a lack of burros, (2) possible public confusion between animals in the adoption program and sale authority animals. BLM noted that during the State Lead meeting the adoption target was reduced after a review of accomplishments to date; however Eastern States stated they would not lower their original target.

BLM furnished the Board, at their request, information concerning Nevada's adoption program costs and strategy. During the discussion of Nevada's program, the Board requested that at its next meeting, the Nevada BLM provide, to the Board, the following information: adoption program, prison program adoptions, and the Nevada Strategy to achieve AML.

Facilities Reports:

The Board discussed the number of animals in facilities. Presently there are 21,996 animals in our holding facilities 6,794 in short term and 15,202 in long term holding. A discussion followed on the age of animals remaining in long term holding. BLM responded that there was not a significant change.

BLM stated that two long term holding facility contracts expire this year and that bids are being solicited for only one facility. This will reduce the number of long term holding facilities to nine.

Forest Service Update

The Forest Service presented a discussion on the recently signed agreement between the two agencies. The new agreement is more comprehensive and covers more aspects of the program unlike the previous agreement that just focused on adoptions. An overview of the Forest Service's program was discussed.

Update on Sale Authority

BLM emphasized that it is working to find good homes for horses that are being sold under the Sale Authority. To date, BLM has sold and delivered approximately 1,000 animals and has pending sales for approximately 1,000 more.

BLM confirmed an unfortunate incident where some animals were re-sold and ended up going to a commercial processing facility. As a result, BLM temporarily halted the sale of the animals to allow time to review procedures. Following this review, BLM has revised the bill of sale, is pursuing talks with the three commercial processing facilities in the United States not to take our sale animals, and is developing an agreement with Ford Motor Company to work with Take Pride in America by providing funding and information through Save the Mustangs. BLM provided a discussion and handout on the cooperation with Ford Motor Company and Take Pride In America's work on Save the Mustangs. During the discussion, questions were presented on the process for funding. BLM agreed to provide a speaker from Take Pride in America to make a presentation at the August 2005 meeting. Ford is managing the web site www.savethemustangs.org along with Take Pride In America and assisting in the effort to find good homes.

The new Bill of Sale was reviewed and discussed and several of the Board members expressed concern that it was more of a preventative measure than an enforceable document.

Repositioning Plan

BLM made a follow up presentation on the Repositioning Plan that led into a discussion on the proposal to describe older unadoptable horses as "Wild Horses" and horses in the adoption program as "Mustangs". BLM stated that the terms suggested by the plan are to help describe the animals clearer and to help counteract any negative connotations associated with the label of "wild horse" for adoption purposes. The term "wild horse" can bring up the image of an uncontrollable wild animal, whereas mustang is seen as a gentler animal.

The Board will support the use of the term "mustang" for marketing purposes, but does not support the use of two separate categories.

Buddy System

In response to the Board's recommendation, BLM presented a revised Buddy System and adoption fee policy that is oriented toward customer appreciation and rewards to previous adopters. This is a change away from a reduced fee policy which the Board questioned at the last meeting due to the negative connotation associated with reducing fees. The new policy redefines the Buddy Program, initiates a Previous Adopter Reward Program, includes a Promotion Animal Program and provides positive marketing opportunities. Revisions to the policy were developed at the BLM State Lead Meeting held in Denver in May of 2005.

The Buddy Program may be used only at satellite adoptions; will include ungentle horses not adopted in the initial offering at full fee; can have an adoption fee as low as \$25, will not include burros, and will only be to individuals that have already adopted a corresponding number of full fee animals.

The Previous Adopter Reward Program may be used to offer four to ten year old ungentle horses at adoption fees as low as \$25 to previous adopters that are experienced and have knowledge of handling and training, and can offer good homes.

The Promotion Animal Program is unchanged from the earlier policy and still allows a lower adoption fee for a special promotional event.

All animals adopted at a fee less than \$125 will have required compliance inspections.

The Board fully supports this proposal.

Selective Removal

BLM presented a revised proposed selective removal policy developed by the State Wild Horse and Burro Leads during their May meeting. They proposed one modification that provides for most 16 years and older horses to remain on the range during gather operations. The draft policy emphasizes maintenance of a diverse age structure on the range, and the removal of 6 years and younger animals, first; 7 to 15 year old animals, second; and 16 year olds and older would be left on the range. As BLM reaches AML most of the animals removed will be younger animals, however, in HMA's that are way over AML, BLM will need to remove some older animals to reach AML.

The Board presented several questions on the ageing process of horses on the range and asked if the BLM's has knowledge of the herd's age structure.

BLM will circulate the draft Instruction Memorandum for full field review prior to implementation. The Board asked to see the final Instruction Memo when signed.

FY 2005 Budget and Review

BLM brought the Board up-to-date on the FY05 budget. Final budget numbers are pending review and consensus by the Steering Committee. The Board was presented a list of all the units of accomplishment that will be achieved under the FY05 budget. One change from the table presented is that Eastern States will maintain their original adoption target number.

The Board requested the accomplishments to date which BLM will provide at the August 05 meeting.

February 2005 Statistics

BLM discussed the table provided to the Board showing February 28, 2005 wild horse and burro populations.

The following numbers were highlighted by BLM:

Total estimated horse populations on the range are 27,369, with an AML of 25,206. Total estimated burro populations on the range are 4,391 with an AML of 2,980. Total estimated animals on the range are 31,760 with AML at 28,186.

Status of Establishing Appropriate Management Level in Nevada

In response to a request from the Board, BLM reported on the status of AML establishment in Nevada. Eighty-eight AMLs are established, 13 are planned for establishment in FY 2005, and one other AML will be established in the future in conjunction with a Forest Territory (Forest Service is lead).

Projections for Appropriate Management Level Achievements.

BLM presented a discussion on two projections of AML achievement based on 18 % and 20 % annual rate of annual population increase. Both of these projections included recruitment estimates (new foals) and mortality estimates. Annual rates of population increases vary by HMA, and depend on predation, sex ratio, severity of winter, forage quality and quantity, water availability, fertility control, and the effects of drought.

In response to funding questions from the Board, BLM does not plan to request any further funding for FY06 removals. The President's budget for FY06 has a \$2.5 million reduction for the wild horse program. Discussion followed that in the out years BLM's total costs will go down after AML is achieved. The goal is to achieve a point where the adoption demand for wild horses exceeds their availability.

Recommendations Discussion

A general discussion was introduced regarding BLM's gelding policy. Costs and logistics of the present policy were discussed. The Board expressed concern over the present policy of only gelding stallions six years of age and older. A discussion occurred on the number of animals that would need to be gelded, costs associated with gelding, gelding vouchers offered to the public, adoption safety, and breeding after adoption. This dialogue resulted in a recommendation for the BLM to review its current gelding policy and look at lowering the age of stallions to be gelded to one year of age.

Questions about the Bill of Sale for animals being sold under Sale Authority were discussed. Brought forward for discussion was the Bill of Sale, its enforceability and its ability to function as a deterrent against animals going to commercial processing. A general discussion followed regarding the language presented in the new Bill of Sale as compared to the adoption agreement and certificate of title. This discussion led to the second recommendation to have the DOI Solicitors Office review its Bill of Sale for the Sale Authority.

Follow up Items

Several other follow up items were listed to be presented at the August, 2005 meeting.

- Status report on Census being done as well as other units of accomplishments.
- Nevada BLM make a presentation on the Nevada Adoption Strategy.
- Request to have a representative from "Take Pride In America" at the August meeting.
- Copy of the selective removal policy before the August meeting.

Next Meeting

Dates suggested were August 26 or August 29, 2005, tentatively scheduled for a location in Wyoming in association with a gather field trip.

National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Recommendations

Tallahassee, Florida

May 23, 2005

1. The Board recommends BLM review its present policy of gelding six year and older horses and consider lowering the gelding age of stallions to one year and older, keeping in mind that special animals may be left ungelded because of their uniqueness. The Board would like a report of the review at the August 2005 Meeting.
2. The Board recommends the DOI Solicitors Office review its Bill of Sale for the Sale Authority. The Board believes the Bill of Sale is unenforceable and there may be inconsistencies between the Bill of Sale for Sale Authority animals and the Certificate of Title for adoption animals.