U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Nevada: Home To AmericaÕs Wild Horses and Burros

Spirit of the American We

ÒCongress finds and declares that wild free-roaming horses and burros are living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West . . .Ó contributing Ò. . . to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and . . .Ó enriching Ò. . . the lives of the American people.Ó

These words are from the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act unanimously passed by Congress on December 15, 1971. Congress set forth legislation to protect, manage and control wild horses and burros on public lands.

Wild horses and burros are to be Òpart of the American scene.Ó The U.S. Department of the Interior, through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, through the Forest Service, are charged with protecting and managing these animals as components of the public lands. The goals include achieving and maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship on the lands.

In Nevada, most wild horses and burros are found on public lands managed by the BLM.

Historically, early explorersÕ journals indica horses were in northern Nevada by the 182 Peter OgdenÕs 1828 journal talks of discov and capturing horses apparently abandoned Indians and of later seeing evidence of a lar horse herd.

The California-bound party lead by John Bidwell in 1841, documented several sightin of horses, and several thefts of their own an mals. One Nevada author, Anthony Amaral, claims that by the 1870s wild horses were qu visible in the state.

CHRIS ROSS

In several areas, ranchers turned loose Shires, Percherons, Hambletonians, Morgan and Irish stations and mares to set a standa and pattern in herds in their geographic area Heavy boned animals capable of pulling wa ons, rather than light saddle horses, appear to have been favored. Cavalry mounts may have added to NevadaÕs wild horse population.

Burros were brought to the West by Jesuit missionaries and were later used extensively by miners. When mining camps failed, the burros were set free to roam the desert.

As ranchers or miners demanded horses or burros, the animals were trapped and trained for the purposes of man. With the advent of the steam engine and tractor and the return of soldiers from World War II, the equines were less in demand and multiplied as the horse and burro has few natural predators. Unless a local rancher or miner claimed a herd, no one seemed to own the animals. Some individuals, called Òmustangers,Ó captured the animals and sold them to slaughterhouses. Their inhumane methods caught the attention of Velma ÒWild Horse AnnieÓ Johnston of Reno, Nevada, who mounted a campaign first to stop inhumane roundups and then to give the animals Federal protection.

Today, Nevada and nine other western states manage wild horses and burros. Nevada is home to more than half of the NationÕs wild horses. Those animals live in more than 100 Herd Management Areas (HMAs).

Challenges in the program vary from how many animals can be supported on rangelands where water and vegetation are limited and shared with other species, to how to place and care for wild horses and burros removed from the lands.

Population Management

When there are too many animals for the vegetation and water available, all species suffer, as does the rangelan

Healthy rangelands have a variety of vegetative specie and support a mix of animals: wildlife, wild horses and burros and domestic livestock. Wildlife is regulated by the state which determines where and when hunting can occur. Livestock numbers are regulated by stipulations in permits issued to ranchers. The primary method of keeping wild horse and burro numbers in check is to gather and remove ÒexcessÓ animals.

Specialists in range management and biology monitor rangeland plants and water, and recommend how many animals should be in an area. Through a public process, recommendations for all species are discussed. Wild hors and burro numbers set for a particular HMA are called Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs).

When AMLs are exceeded, BLM plans and oversees a Ògather.Ó In Nevada, most horses and burros are gathe via helicopter provided by a contractor. Horses are herded into a temporary trap site, made up of jute wings which funnel the horses into portable corrals.

The equines are sorted by sex and age. Younger animals are transported to a preparation center where they are readied for adoption to private citizens who will give them a good home. Older animals, which have a knowledge of the herdÕs territory, are released into the HMA where they often thrive with less competition for forage and water.

Normally, gathers in Nevada occur during the non-foaling season which is July through late February. Occasionally, emergency situations such as drought, severe winters or wildland fires necessitate emergency gathers.

Since 1992, Nevada BLM has fostered a fertility control project to slow population growth. Once perfected by scientists, this immunocontraception project could give BLM another tool to achieve and maintain AMLs.

JOHN WINNEPENNINKX

Adopt a Living Legend

Many American citizens have adopted a wild horse or burro. These sturdy creatures have qualities which lend themselves to endurance riding and similar activities which require good feet and the knowledge a creature on the range learns from fending for itself.

An adopter must have adequate facilities to provide humane care and treatment for the adopted animal. A corral or enclosed pasture of approximately 400 square feet, with fencing six feet high for horses or five feet high for burros, and a shelter is required. Rounded pipes, pole or similar materials without protrusions are best. Animals may also be stabled. Inspections of facilities will be made by a local BLM employee.

To adopt, you must be 18 years of age, and have no convictions for inhumane treatment of animals. Parents or legal guardians often adopt a horse or burro and allow children to assist in caring for and training the animal.

In Nevada, BLM has a permanent center where wild horses and burros gathered from public lands receive inoculations, are freeze marked with a unique registration number, and are tested to make sure they do not have Equine Infectious Anemia. Adopters receive the animalÕs health card so they can continue care.

One year after signing the adoption agreement, an individual who has given the animal proper care and maintenance may apply for and receive title to the horse or burro.

The base adoption fee is $125 per animal. Competitive bidding is employed at adoptions sponsored at temporary locations where the animals have been transported to be more convenient to the public. These ÒsatelliteÓ adoptions are listed on the Internet, at http://www.blm.gov/whb.

NevadaÕs permanent site is located at Palomino Valley, north of the Reno-Sparks area. Pre-approved adopters may call for appointments, (775) 475-2222.

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