

2024 Summit Program



Hosted by:



FREES

Free-Roaming Equid and Ecosystem Sustainability Network (FREES; <https://extension.usu.edu/freesnetwork/>). Free-roaming equids include wild horses and burros (WHBs) as defined by the 1971 Act as well as free-roaming horses and burros not covered by the Act.

**This Summit would not be possible without support from our Sponsors.
THANK YOU!**



**National Cattlemen's
Beef Association**



Welcome to the 2024 FREES Summit. This year's summit will focus on free-roaming equid interactions with wildlife. A blend of scientific talks, field experiences, and facilitated groups will work to connect wildlife, conservation, and wild horse and burro management interests.

The FREES Network –Steering Committee

Dr. Eric Thacker, Utah State University

Celeste Carlisle, Chair, National BLM and USFS Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board

Dr. Jason Bruemmer, Project Leader, Population Management Project

Dr. Kate Schoenecker, U.S. Geological Survey

Teresa Drotar, USDA Forest Service

Todd Graham, Wyoming Game and Fish

Redge Johnson, Executive Director of the Governor's Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office

Dr. Barry Perryman, University of Nevada-Reno

Eric Davis, USDA Forest Service

Riley Peck, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

Dr. Sarah King, Colorado State University

Dr. Sherm Swanson, Professor Emeritus, University of Nevada-Reno

Commissioner Tammy Pearson, Beaver County, Utah

Dr. Ursula Bechert, Spay-vac for Wildlife, Inc.

Stephanie Boyles Griffin, Wildlife Protection, Humane Society of the United States

Ruth Thompson, Bureau of Land Management

Scott Fluor, Bureau of Land Management

Robin Watson, Bureau of Land Management

Gary McCuin, University of Nevada-Reno

Dr. Amanda Gearhart, Nevada Division of Wildlife Resources

The FREES Steering Committee is comprised of over a dozen professionals from various organizations who are involved in free-roaming equid management. One mission of the Steering Committee is to provide opportunities for inclusive and unbiased learning. The FREES Summit is the most comprehensive educational resources organized by the Steering Committee as it ensures all beliefs are acknowledged.



Conference Venue: Elko Conference Center

<https://exploreelko.com/meetings/venues/venue-detail-elko-conference-center/>

700 Moren Way, Elko Nevada

Venue Layout:



Summit Guidelines for all Participants

1. Comments and discussions will be facilitated to help ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak and be heard. Please take this opportunity and be engaged! The more we collaborate and build relationships, the better the Summit and the future of working together will be. Get outside of your comfort zone and meet others with different ideas!
2. All attendees show mutual respect. Grandstanding, yelling, or other disrespectful behavior is not allowed.
3. Please always wear your name tags while participating in the Summit.
4. Refrain from using cell phones. Please step outside for calls.
5. Social Media Use – Participants may post thoughts and ideas from the Summit and are encouraged to do so. Inflammatory or adversarial posts are strongly discouraged. Please do not post the thoughts or statements made by others – these are usually taken out of context.
7. This is not a debate and people will have varying opinions. We value all opinions. If there are inaccuracies, we ask that you address them in a constructive and respectful conversation. These conversations may need to take place at different and more appropriate times during the Summit. Work with the facilitator if you have questions about dialogue.

8. No attendees will be allowed to record the Summit proceedings.
9. Media will check in at the registration table and will be guided to the space designated for cameras or to those Summit conveners designated to help with media.
10. The Summit conveners and hosts seek your input about how to make this event successful and in planning future related events. Please provide feedback through meeting Qualtrics evaluations links which will be provided at the registration desk.
11. Your safety and welfare are essential. Notify the facilitator or Summit conveners immediately if you have any concerns.
12. Meeting disruption or poor behavior may result in being asked to leave by the facilitator and escorted off the premise by security. If asked to leave, disruptive persons will not be allowed to return to the Summit.

If you are feeling sick or have encountered someone who has tested positive for COVID, self-isolate and stay home.

Summit at a Glance

Monday April 15	5pm 6pm-9pm	Summit Registration- Elko Conference Center Welcome Reception, Light food and drink served
Tuesday, April 16	8:30-9:10am	Conference Welcome Opening Plenary Session <i>Rangeland's Lowest Common Denominator</i>
	9:10 10:10 10:20 10:40	Wildlife Agency Updates TWS Horse and Burro Update Q&A Panel with Wildlife Updates Morning Break
	11:00-11:40 11:40	Morning Science Talks Taco Bar Lunch (provided)
	12:40pm 2:00-4:00 4:20 5:00-5:30 5:45	Fertility Control Mixer Afternoon Science Talks Q&A Panel with BLM and USFS Poster Session Dinner Buffet and Entertainment (Provided)
Wednesday, April 17	8:00am 10:00	Buses Depart Elko Conference Center Quilici Springs Stop

	11:40	Spruce Mountain Fuels and Habitat Project
	12:30pm	Lunch Provided
	4:00	Arrive Elko Conference Center
		Dinner on your own
Thursday, April 18	8:30am	Breakout Group Overview
	8:40	Adjourn to Breakout Rooms
	10:00	Group Reports
	11:00	Pasta Bar Lunch Provided
	12:15pm	Summit Closing Remarks and Adjourn

Summit Program Agenda

Tuesday, April 16, 2024

FREES Wildlife & Habitat Ecology Symposium

The critical importance of ecosystem and landscape health; providing sustainability for wildlife, horses, and everything else

Conference Welcome

FREES Steering Committee and Summit Organizers

Plenary: Rangelands Lowest Common Denominator



Dr. Amanda Gearhart
Wildlife Staff Specialist, Habitat Division
Nevada Department of Wildlife

Wildlife Agency Updates

- 9:10 **Nevada Department of Wildlife** – Alan Jenne, Director
Wildlife Agency Involvement with Wild Horses and Burros
- 9:20 **Utah Department of Wildlife** – Covy Jones, Wildlife Chief
Wildlife Agency Update
- 9:30 **Arizona Game and Fish Department** – Esther Rubin, Research Branch Chief
Wildlife Agency Update
- 9:40 **Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife** – Brian Wolfer, Deputy Division Chief
Wildlife Agency Update
- 9:50 **Colorado Parks and Wildlife** – Brian Holmes, Regional Biologist
Virtual Wildlife Agency Update
- 10:00 **Wyoming Game and Fish** – Kevin Spence, Green River Region Wildlife Biologist
Virtual Wildlife Agency Update
- 10:10 **The Wildlife Society** – Bob Lanka, President
Wild Horse and Burro Update
- 10:20 Panel Q&A with State Wildlife Agencies

Morning Science Talks

Moderator: Dr. Kate Schoenecker, USGS

- 11:00 ***The importance of Great Basin sagebrush ecosystems: forming the foundation for a “thriving ecological balance.”*** – Steve Hanser, Sagebrush Ecosystem Specialist and Deputy Center Director, USGS Fort Collins Science Center (virtual)
- 11:20 ***Riparian ecosystems: Their structure and function, and how we avoid damage or recover if they are degraded*** – Sherm Swanson, Rangeland & Riparian Ecology & Management Professor Emeritus, UNR

Darting and Fertility Control Mixer

Sponsored by: Botstiber Institute and The Science and Conservation Center

- 12:40 ***Thoughts on fertility control in horses***, Stephanie Boyles Griffin, Chair of the Advisory Committee for the Botstiber Institute for Wildlife Fertility Control
- 12:50 Self-Guided Experiences:
- Darting demonstrations
 - Partner Projects
 - USFS Wild Horse Pack String

Afternoon Science Talks

Moderator: Sherm Swanson, UNR (retired)

- 2:00 ***Wildlife habitat requirements for a “thriving ecological balance***– Mark Freese, Division Administrator, Habitat Division, NDOW.
- 2:20 ***From Birds to Bees: Healthy Habitats Promote Thriving Ecological Communities*** – Jonathan Young, Wildlife Staff Specialist, Wildlife Diversity Division, NDOW
- 2:40 ***The physiology of a healthy horse and subsequent needs for healthy populations; how overpopulation depletes the very things horses need*** – Jason Bruemmer, DVM, USDA-APHIS
- 3:00 ***What we know and don’t know about competition, co-occurrence, avoidance, or facilitation between wildlife and horses*** – Kate Schoenecker, Research Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Geological Survey, Fort Collins Science Center
- 3:20 ***Influence of predation by mountain lions on horse population growth rates*** –David Stoner, Research Professor, Utah State University
- 3:40 **BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program Update and Priorities** – Scott Fluor, On-Range Branch Chief, Bureau of Land Management (virtual)
- 4:00 **USFS Wild Horse and Burro Program Update; and U.S. Forest Service ‘needs’ for managing horses** – Eric Davis, USFS Assistant Director, Rangeland and Restoration, and Teresa Drotar, DVM, National Wild Horse and Burro Program Manager, USFS
- 4:20 **Panel Q&A with BLM and USFS**
- 5:00 Poster Session
- 5:45 Summit Dinner and Entertainment (Barry Perryman and Celeste Carlisle)

Wednesday, April 17, 2024

FREES FIELD TOUR

- 7:30 Meet and Board Buses- Elko Conference Center
- 8:00 Buses Depart for Quilici Spring (Maggie Creek Video)
- 10:00 Quilici Spring stop
- History of Quilici Spring and interactions with wild horses
 - Wild horse and wildlife interactions at water
 - Wild horse management in Spruce Pequop HMA

- 11:40 Spruce Mountain Fuels and Habitat projects
 - Fuels Treatments
 - Habitat treatments for priority wildlife
- 12:30 Lunch (Provided) and discussions with field tour presenters.
- 1:45 Depart for Elko
- 3:45 Arrive Elk, NV
- 4:00 Evening on your own

Thursday, April 18, 2024

A Call to Action

Finding common ground to move the herd forward

Breakout Sessions: Dan Adams, Langdon Group

- 8:30 Ground rules and approach
- 8:40 Break out Groups ~**Off Range Holding**~ (Dan Adams)

Overview: *Based on input from the previous two FREES summits and feedback prior to this summit, there is a strong desire to develop creative solutions and innovative ideas that are action oriented. The format for Thursday will be very participatory and driven by the participants based on their individual passions and the topics discussed throughout the summit.*

We invite you to think of a topic that you would like to discuss in a breakout group. Write down your thoughts and move from critique or complaint to ideas and problem solving! Then on Thursday morning, we will ask folks that want to lead a breakout discussion to come to the front of the room and give a two minute pitch about their topic. Participants will then self-select which breakout they want to attend and we will convene for a first round of dialogue. We will then follow this same format for a second and third round and then reconvene as a large group and share highlights of what was discussed. We encourage people to think about general categories that we may use to organize the breakout sessions. This might include on-range, off-range, organizational and systemic needs, fertility control, etc.

An essential element to the implementation of ideas will be collaborative partnerships (coalitions) and ideas that can be implemented at scale (place based initiatives).

All ideas will be documented and then shared with elected officials and agency leaders at the state and federal level.

- 10:00 Reports (Group Leads)
- 11:30 Groups Reconvene: wrap up and assignments/action items
- 12:00 Lunch (Provided)
- 12:15 Closing Remarks, Adjourn

Summit Notes and Networking



BOTSTIBER INSTITUTE
FOR WILDLIFE FERTILITY CONTROL



BRING HOME YOUR OWN WILD HORSE ^{OR} BURRO



BLM ADOPTION AND SALES EVENTS

<https://www.blm.gov/programs/wild-horse-and-burro/adoption-and-sales/events>