

2026 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.
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Welcome to the 2026 FREES Summit. This year's Summit will explore **The Trade-offs of Free-Roaming Equid Management: Ecology, Economics, and Ethics**, bringing together diverse perspectives on the complex challenges and choices involved in managing free-roaming equids. Through a blend of panel discussions, scientific presentations, field experiences, and facilitated conversations, participants will examine the ecological, economic, and ethical dimensions of management while exploring the trade-offs, shared challenges, and potential pathways forward. The Summit is designed to foster meaningful dialogue among wildlife, conservation, land management, and wild horse and burro communities and create space for thoughtful, informed discussion across differing perspectives.

The FREES Network –Steering Committee

Dr. David Stoner, FREES Director, Utah State University

Dr. Eric Thacker, Associate Professor, Utah State University

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

Dr. Jason Bruemmer, Project Leader, Population Management Project, USDA WS/NWRC

Dr. Kate Schoenecker, U.S. Geological Survey

Dr. Teresa Drotar, USDA Forest Service

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

Nicole Nielson, Planning Program Manager, Utah Public Lands

Jason Vernon, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

Dr. Barry Perryman, University of Nevada-Reno

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, Senior Principal, Humane World for Animals

Scott Fluor, Bureau of Land Management, Retired

Robin Watson, Bureau of Land Management

Dr. Amanda Gearhart, FREES Committee Member

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.



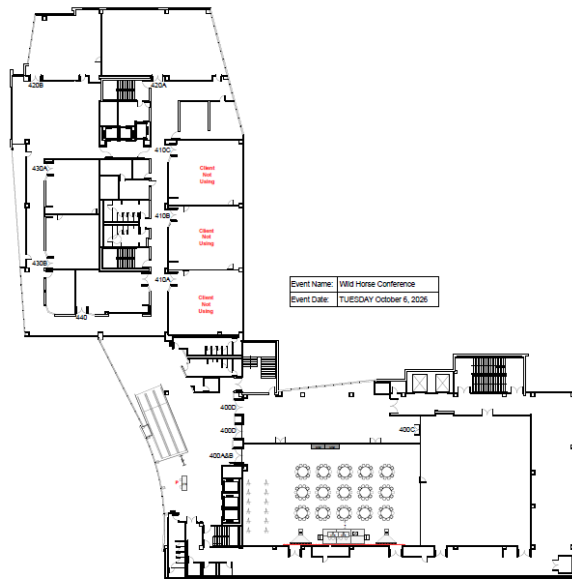
Conference Venue:



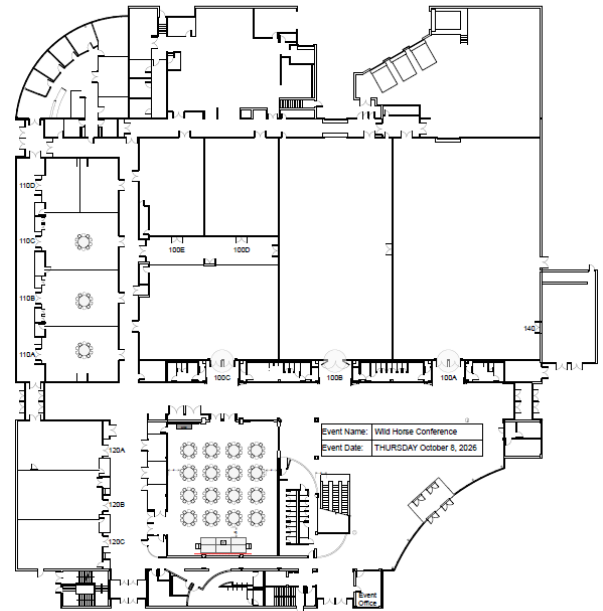
boise | centre

Boise Centre | 850 W Front St, Boise, ID 83702

Boise Centre -
Full East Building



Boise Centre -
Full West Building



Summit Guidelines for all Participants

By attending the Summit, participants acknowledge and agree to abide by the guidelines, expectations, and policies outlined in this program. These guidelines are intended to help create a respectful, inclusive, and productive environment for all attendees.

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. The Summit 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.

Summit at a Glance

Conference Schedule			
Day	Time	Session	Location
Tuesday October 6	8:00–8:45 a.m.	Welcome, FREES Director Dr. David Stoner Keynote, Deputy Assistant Secretary Brenda Younkin	Ballrooms
	8:45- 9:15 a.m.	Plenary, USU Associate Professor Dr. Eric Thacker	Ballrooms
	9:15-9:30 a.m.	<i>Morning Break</i>	Foyer
	9:30-noon	Panel Discussions	Ballrooms
	12:00-1:15 p.m.	Lunch on your own	
	1:15-2:15 p.m.	Applied Management Talks	Ballrooms
	2:15 p.m.	<i>Afternoon Break</i>	Foyer
	2:30-3:30 p.m.	Fertility Control Think Tank Workshop	Ballrooms
	3:30-4:30 p.m.	Collaborating Across Perspectives Workshop	Ballrooms
	5:00 p.m.	Poster Session	Ballrooms
	5:45- 8:00 p.m.	Dinner and Entertainment	Ballrooms

Wednesday October 7	8:00 a.m.	Load Buses	Front Turn Out
	9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.	BLM Field Tours (<i>lunch included</i>)	
	4:00 p.m.	Return Boise Centre- Evening on Own	
Thursday October 8	8:00–8:30 a.m.	Continental Breakfast	Foyer
	8:30-11:30	World Café Overview and Breakout Sessions	Ballrooms/Breakouts
	11:30- noon	Debrief and Action Items	Ballrooms
	12:00 p.m.	Summit Remarks and Adjourn	Ballrooms

Summit Program Agenda

Tuesday, October 6th, 2026



Conference Welcome
FREES Director
Dr. David Stoner



Keynote:
The Future of Fertility Control on Public Lands
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Land and Minerals Mgmt
Brenda Younkin



Plenary:
A Changing Landscape: Climate Trends and
Rangeland Conditions Across the West
Dr. Eric Thacker, Utah State University

Panel Discussions

- 9:30 **Agriculture and Grazing Panel**
Moderators: **Redge Johnson and Nicole Nielson, Utah Public Lands**
Panelists:
Stacy Davies, Ranch Manager for the Roaring Springs Ranch in southeastern OR.
Tammy Pearson, Beaver County Utah Commissioner
Garrett Edmonds, Director of the Public Lands Council and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association Government Affairs.
Slate Stewart, Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) in Eastern UT
- 10:00 **Rangeland Resources Panel**
Moderator: **Dr. Amanda Gearhart, FREES Committee**
Panelists:
Amanda Gearhart, FREES Committee
Eric Thacker, Associate Professor, Utah State University
Jason Vernon, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
- 10:30 **Animal Advocacy and Welfare Panel**
Moderator: **Stephanie Boyles-Griffin, Humane World for Animals**
Panelists:
Stephanie Boyles Griffin, Humane World for Animals
Ryan McCarthy, Wild Horse Population Field Manager, Return to Freedom
Kayla Grams, Senior Biologist, Science & Conservation Center
Jan Drake, Wild Horses of America Foundation
- 11:00 **Wildlife Panel**
Moderator: **Dr. Kate Schoenecker, US Geological Survey**
Panelists:
Steve Belinda, Chief Conservation Officer at Mule Deer Foundation
Caleb McAdoo, Nevada Department of Wildlife
Esther Rubin, Arizona Game and Fish
Mike Cox, Nevada Department of Wildlife, Retired
Ryan Platte, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Applied Management Talks

Moderator: Dr. David Stoner, Utah State University

- 1:15 ***Reliable Aerial Surveys for Wild Horse and Burro Herd Management***
Michelle Crabb, Population Biologist, BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program
- 1:30 ***Updated GonaCon Application (s)***
Jason Bruemmer, DVM, USDA-APHIS

- 1:45 *A Simple Framework to Map the Usable Space of Free-Roaming Equids Across the Western United States*
Alexander Hernandez, Research Biologist, USDA-ARS
- 2:00 *Water for Wildlife*
Sherman Swanson, Coordinator, Nevada Creeks and Communities Team, Rangeland & Riparian Ecology & Management Professor Emeritus, UNR: AVRS & UNCE

Afternoon Workshops

- 2:30 **Fertility Control Think Tank**
Facilitator: Dr. Ursula Bechart, Spayvac for Wildlife, Inc.
- This interactive think tank will bring together diverse perspectives to explore the opportunities, challenges, and trade-offs associated with fertility control in free-roaming equid management. Participants will examine current approaches, share experiences and ideas, identify knowledge gaps, and consider priorities for future research, application, and collaboration.
- 3:30 **Collaborating Across Perspectives**
Facilitator: Dan Adams, Langdon Group
- This participatory workshop will explore practical tools for communicating across differing perspectives, navigating conflict, and building productive relationships. Participants will engage in facilitated activities designed to strengthen listening, collaboration, and problem-solving skills for addressing complex free-roaming equid management challenges.
- 5:00 Poster Session
- 5:45 Summit Dinner and Entertainment

Wednesday, October 7th, 2026

FREES FIELD TOUR

- 7:30 Meet and Board Buses- Boise Centre Front Street Turnout
- 8:00 Buses Depart
- 9:00 **Bruneau Off-Range Wild Horse Corrals**

The Bruneau Off-Range Wild Horse Corrals are privately owned and operated and currently provide care for just over 1,100 wild horses. The 80-acre facility contains 39 large holding pens, each measuring 70,000 square feet and capable of safely holding approximately 30 - 80 horses.

The horses receive an abundance of feed tailored to their needs each day, along with a constant supply of fresh water through automatic watering troughs. Free choice mineral block supplements are also provided to the animals and a veterinarian routinely inspect them and provides medical care as needed. Additionally, the BLM strives to place horses removed from the range into good private homes. Animals at the Bruneau facility are routinely offered for adoption or purchase throughout the year at off-site adoption or Online Corral adoption events. So far in 2026, over 1,000 wild horses from the Bruneau Off-Range Corrals were offered for adoption and sale with over 600 being placed into private care, saving the American taxpayer over \$7.5 million in caring costs for the animal's lifetime.

11:40 Lunch (Provided) and discussions with field tour presenters

1:00 **Boise Wild Horse Off-Range Corral**

The BLM facility cares for wild horses—and sometimes a few burros—in **more than 101,000 square feet of corral space**. It serves as an off-range facility where animals are cared for while awaiting adoption or, in some cases, return to the range. The visit will provide an opportunity to see the facility, learn about daily operations and animal care, and explore the decisions and challenges involved in managing horses in an off-range setting. Participants will gain firsthand perspective on an often-overlooked component of free-roaming equid management.

4:30 Arrive Boise Centre

5:00 Evening on your own

Thursday, October 8th, 2026

Breakout Sessions: Dan Adams, Langdon Group

Welcome to Day 4!

Since the Reno FREES Summit in 2019, FREES participants have sought to meaningfully address the Wild Horse and Burro issues in a meaningful and inclusive manner that worked in partnership with Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service. Ideas shared by summit participants have included addressing the issues at scale, building off of successes from other similar issues, utilizing the best possible science, and successfully managing horses and burros. These ideas are represented in the idea of utilizing Place Based Collaboratives to address on range wild horse and burro issues which will ultimately reduce the number of horses going into off range holding.

Dan Adams will share the basic premise of this Place Based Collaborative approach and participants will then engage in three breakout sessions utilizing a “world café” format where each of the summit participants will rotate between three tables representing three key questions we need to address to help further develop this idea and framework.

Agenda:

- 8:30 to 9:00. Overview of Place Based Collaboratives – Dan Adams, Langdon Group
- 9:00 to 9:10. World Café Overview
- 9:10 to 9:50. World Café Breakout Session One
- 9:50 to 9:55. Transition
- 9:55 to 10:35. World Café Breakout Session Two
- 10:35 to 10:40. Transition
- 10:40 to 11:20. World Café Breakfast Session Three
- 11:25 to 11:30. Gather for Large Group Debrief
- 11:30 to 12:00. Large Group Debrief and Next Steps
- 12:00 Adjourn/Lunch on your own



BLM ADOPTION AND SALES EVENTS

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