



News Release

BLM Headquarters Office

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BLM prepares for emergency action to save drought-stricken wild horses and burros on public lands

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. – The Bureau of Land Management today announced plans to take emergency action to save imperiled animals and prevent widespread thirst and mortality in wild horse and burro herds as drought intensifies across most of the West.

The BLM estimates more than 6,000 additional wild horses and burros should be gathered from public lands by the end of September through emergency actions, which can be taken in response to lack of water or forage, or due to impacts from wildfire or disease. Already this year, nearly 1,200 animals have been gathered through emergency actions.

Most emergency gathers will take place in herds where chronic overpopulation has already stretched the available food and water to its limits. Now faced with exceptional drought conditions, these animals are left with very little water or forage to survive the summer and winter, and some have become dependent on unreliable private sources. In some herds, the BLM has already started hauling supplemental water as a temporary measure before an emergency gather can take place.

“As one of the agencies charged with the responsibility to protect and manage America’s wild horses and burros, the BLM is prepared to take emergency action where we can in order to save the lives of these cherished animals,” said **Nada Wolff Culver, BLM Deputy Director, Policy and Programs**. “At the same time, we are committed to continuing our efforts to reduce overpopulation across the West and achieve healthy, sustainable herd sizes that are more capable of withstanding severe conditions, including prolonged drought, which are becoming more frequent due to climate change.”

The estimated wild horse and burro population on BLM-managed public lands decreased for the first time since 2012 last year, from a record of approximately 95,000 animals to 86,000 animals as of March 1, 2021. The estimated population still remains more than three times what is sustainable and healthy for the land and the animals. Herd overpopulation threatens the welfare of the wild horses and burros (especially during drought) and the long-term health of the land and the other species that share public lands.

Wild horses and burros gathered through these emergency actions will be checked by a veterinarian, vaccinated against common equine diseases and made available to the public for adoption. BLM is taking [additional steps](#) to secure the health and safety of adopted wild horses and burros through the Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Incentive Program. Unadopted animals will eventually be transferred to private pastures where they will live out their lives in a free-roaming environment, but at cost to taxpayers.

“I encourage anyone who is capable of caring for one of these Living Legends to consider giving one a loving home,” added **Culver**. “These are incredible animals that deserve a chance to thrive with a caring adopter.”

To accommodate the expected emergency actions, the BLM has released a new tentative schedule for wild horse and burro gathers through the end of Fiscal Year 2021, [which can be accessed here](#). For a list of wild horse and burro adoption opportunities, visit the [adoption event schedule](#).

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This year, we invite everyone to reimagine your public lands as we celebrate 75 years of the BLM's stewardship and service to the American people. The BLM manages approximately 245 million acres of public land located primarily in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The agency's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.