



Free Roaming Equids and Ecosystem Sustainability Network

Delegates from over 90 different organizations convened at the Free-Roaming Equids and Ecosystem Sustainability Summit, held May 29-31, 2019 in Reno, Nevada in search of common ground to achieve the goal of “healthy herds on healthy rangelands.” They ignited a “non-political” grassroots movement now known as the Free-Roaming Equid and Ecosystem Sustainability Network or FREES.

FREES seeks to enhance communication and engage diverse stakeholder groups in meaningful dialogue as we work together to realize a common goal of “healthy herds on healthy rangelands.” Participation in FREES is open to all individuals and organizations, regardless of perspectives. FREES seeks to integrate sound science with local knowledge, human perceptions, and values into a collaborative national network of information sharing, planning, and action. FREES is committed to seeking to better understand and respect individual opinions while striving to develop meaningful, actionable objectives to be implemented judiciously, compassionately, humanely, and expeditiously.

FREES endorses diversity and seeks to engage diverse publics in developing solutions that are consensus based and agreeable to the preponderance of public land and free-roaming equid stakeholders. FREES recognizes that there is not one single solution, and as such strives to create innovative and practical strategies that are scientifically sound and are within the purview and management authority of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the USDA Forest Service, Native American Tribes, and the states. To fund the strategies, FREES recognizes that the U.S. Congress and Executive Branch, state legislatures, non-governmental organizations, and private individuals must be fully engaged. *As there are multiple coalitions and groups convening to address the needs of equids, it should be clarified that FREES delegates are participating in the process as representative of different interested agencies and organizations and not as members of the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board.*

At the Summit, working groups were created to address specific needs and issues. These groups will have monthly conference calls facilitated by the Langdon Group (a third-party neutral consulting firm), which also facilitated the 2019 Reno Summit. The working groups fully engaged in September 2019.

1. Population Management Working Group, led by Redge Johnson and Callie Hendrickson

- a. Assess and improve gathering methods and population growth suppression strategies
- b. Re-think the status quo for holding facilities and distribution of horses
- c. Identify and understand successful efforts for collecting and analyzing data

2. Rangeland Conditions and Habitat Working Group, led by Gary McCuin and Barry Perryman

- a. Identify common misperceptions regarding federally defined Wild Horse and Burro habitat conditions
- b. Identify ecological and cultural “hot spots”

3. Outreach and Communication Working Group, led by Terry Messmer

- a. Develop collaborative committee focused on public messaging/education and congressional strategy
- b. Develop organizing structure and funding strategy for working groups
- c. Develop a structure and process to build trust and consensus in FREES

Immediate Implementation Actions

FREES has started planning for a May 2020 Free-Roaming Equid Summit in Wyoming. Your attendance at this Summit would be encouraged and appreciated.

A Chronology of Free-Roaming Equid

How we got here...

- 50 million years ago – Prior to becoming extirpated, horses evolved on the North American continent prior to the Ice Age. They became extirpated approximately 10,000 years ago, about the same time as their major predators; Sabre Tooth Cats, Dire Wolves, American Lion and the Short Nosed Bear. These predators were much larger than modern day predators.
- 1490's – Columbus's second voyage re-introduced Spanish horses to the North American continent.
- 1600s-1900s – Native Americans and European Americans used horses for transportation, farming, and hunting.
- 1914-1918 – During the First World War, there was a shortage of horses in Europe. The U.S. alone shipped over 1 million horses and burros to the battlefields of France. General Pershing's Expeditionary Force brought another 180,000. Many did not return to the U.S. Over 8 million horses and burros died in WWI.
- 1920-1959 – Free-roaming equids were not protected. The herds were used by ranchers and others as a supplemental source of income. The domestic horse population shrunk from 20 million to 3 million, largely due to the invention of the internal combustion engine and a decline in the dependency on 'horse power'.
- 1959 – "Wild Horse Annie Act" (Public Law 86-234) restricted mustanging and protected wild horses and burros but did not require their management.
- 1971 – Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act provided for the management of wild horses and burros by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service on public lands where they occurred at the time the Act was passed.
- 1975 – Ron Hall (BLM) approached Jay Kirk Patrick about using fertility control to manage wild horses.
- 1976 – Federal Land Policy and Management Act amended the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act to allow the use of helicopters and motorized vehicles to manage wild horses and burros on public lands.
- 1978 – Public Rangelands Improvement Act directed the Secretaries to "maintain a current inventory of wild horses and burros on given areas of public lands [Herd Management Areas]" to determine "whether and where overpopulation exists." It directed the Secretaries to "determine appropriate management levels [AML] ... and determine whether appropriate management levels should be achieved by removal or destruction of excess animals or through other options (such as sterilization or natural controls on population levels)." Additionally, it directed the Secretaries to euthanize or sell without restriction, "additional excess wild free-roaming horses and burros for which an adoption demand by qualified individuals does not exist ... in the most humane and cost-efficient manner possible." It authorized the Secretaries to transfer title of adopted wild horses and burros to individuals that have provided humane conditions, treatment, and care for the animal for a period of one year.
- 1982 – Buford Policy - BLM euthanized 47 excess animals between 1981 and 1982. After a large public outcry, BLM Director Robert Buford placed a ban on the destruction of healthy horses.
- 1984 – Congress tripled wild horse and burro program funding (PL 98-473) and directed BLM to triple removals. BLM removed 18,959 horses in 1985, after removing 6,084 horses in 1984; on-range populations dropped from 60,356 in March 1984 to 44,763 by March 1986.

- 1988-2004 – Appropriations Rider - Congress inserted an Interior Appropriations Rider stating that, “appropriations herein made shall not be available for the destruction of healthy, unadopted, wild horses and burros in the care of the Bureau or its contractors.”
- 1988 – PZP fertility control first used on a small scale to help manage wild horse populations on ASIS Island.
- 1994 – PZP ASIS Island management planned use and environmental documents.
- 2004-Present – BLM began the Fertility Control Program in collaboration with Humane Society of the United States. BLM continues to support the development and implementation of fertility control methods for wild horses; however, significant reductions in the rate of population increase have not yet been apparent and fertility control remains difficult to administer on a population level.
- 2005 – Omnibus Appropriations Bill - Despite their legal requirement to sell excess wild horses and burros without limitation, BLM implemented internal controls intended to prevent slaughter of sold animals. As part of the sale of any wild horse or burro, buyers must agree not to knowingly sell or transfer ownership of the animals to persons or organizations that intend to resell, trade, or give away animals for processing into commercial products.
- 2010-Present – Congress inserted language into the text of Interior Appropriations, prohibiting “the destruction of healthy, unadopted, wild horses and burros in the care of the Bureau or its contractors or for the sale of wild horses and burros that results in their destruction for processing into commercial products.”
- 2013 – National Academy of Science Report found that the “continuation of ‘business as usual’ practices will be expensive and unproductive for BLM. Because compelling evidence exists that there are more horses on public rangelands than reported at the national level and that horse population growth rates are high, unmanaged populations would probably double in about 4 years. If populations were not actively managed for even a short time, the abundance of horses on public rangelands would increase until animals became food-limited. Food-limited horse populations would affect forage and water resources for all other animals on shared rangelands and potentially conflict with the multiple-use policy of public rangelands and the legislative mandate to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance.”
- 2017 – BLM Wild Horse and Advisory Board recommended stipulations of the [1971 Act, as amended,] by offering all suitable animals in long and short term holding deemed unadoptable for sale without limitation or humane euthanasia. Those animals deemed unsuitable for sale should then be destroyed in the most humane manner possible.”
- 2017 – First Equid Summit held in Salt Lake City, Utah, with limited invitation-only attendance.
- 2019 – Second Equid Summit held in Reno, Nevada, with over 90 organizations represented from the United States and Canada with no protests. Summit delegates established three highly diverse working groups to tackle issues facing wild horses and burros.
- 2019 – BLM set a policy to provide a \$500 payment to individuals who adopt an untrained wild horse or burro, with an additional \$500 payment one year later, when the title for the animal is transferred to the new owner.
- 2019 – BLM estimates that there are 88,090 wild horses and burros on range lands. Today, 10,267 horses and burros currently held in feedlot-type short-term holding facilities and over 47,00 horses and burros held in long-term pastures. The 2019 program budget was \$ 81.226 million, of which \$50 million is used to support the off-range operations.

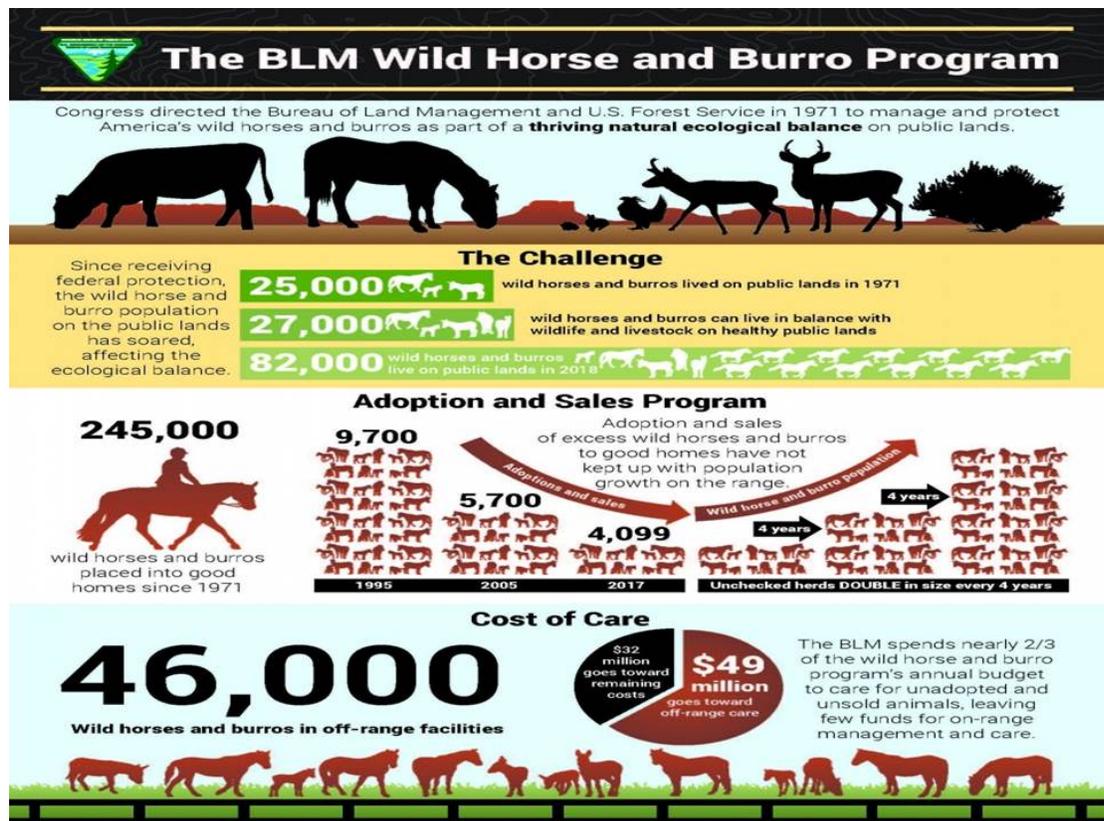


Free Roaming Equids and Ecosystem Sustainability Network

Terry Messmer, Ph.D., Director
Berryman Institute, Utah State University

The Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act (WFRHBA) gave the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) the statutory obligation to manage and protect free-roaming (feral) equids (i.e., wild horse and burros [WHBs]) in designated herd management areas (HMAs) within the sagebrush biome. The intent of the WFRHBA was to ensure healthy populations of free-roaming equids, defined as WHBs, on HMAs in ecological balance with other multiple-uses. As of March 1, 2018, ecological balance referred as the appropriate management level for BLM-administered WHB herds was set at 26,690. In March 2019, the BLM estimated that there were 88,090 WHBs inhabiting designated HMAs, and surrounding herd areas. Overabundant WHBs and other free-roaming equids are impacting the overall health of the western rangelands by degrading ecosystem functions and reducing the forage, cover, and water available for wildlife. The WFRHBA identified tools that the BLM and USFS could use in the management WHBs. The U.S. Congress has repeatedly blocked the use of two of the tools (i.e., the sale of WHBs without limitation and euthanasia) which had been historically used to manage populations. Without active management to reduce growth rates, the on-range WHB population within 4 years could exceed 160,000. By 2035, over 1 million WHBs could inhabit western rangelands. As herds increase, it is anticipated that more WHBs will die from dehydration, starvation, and vehicle collisions, and that their impacts on native wildlife and rangelands will become irreversible. The BLM and USFS have retained the ability to gather WHBs in areas where the populations are impacting the rangeland and the health of the animals is

compromised. If gathered animals are not adopted or sold under applicable legal limitations, the agencies must care for them for the remainder of their lives. In Fiscal Year 2018, the BLM spent \$49.8 million, 61% of its \$81.2 million budget to care for animals in holding facilities. Public stakeholder support will be required to achieve AML.



What is the Free Roaming Equids and Ecosystem Sustainability Network?

Despite the documented negative ecological impacts of WHBs and other free-roaming equids, public stakeholders hold them in high regard. As Congress, the BLM, USFS, Native tribes, and the states begin to pursue WHB and free-roaming equid management options, all must develop, implement, and evaluate proactive public outreach programs that inform the public about the "tradeoffs" that could result from the failure to implement the WFRHBA.

The human-dimensions of 'wild horse and burros' management are less understood than the ecological or biological problems. For biological considerations, over 9 billion agricultural animals are slaughtered in the United States each year. In the name of humaneness, an estimated 1.5 million companion animals are euthanized on an annual basis. Contemporary WHB management policies, which include a legacy of administrative and political constraints on euthanizing healthy horses suggest that WHBs are valued above all other animals in contemporary U.S. society.

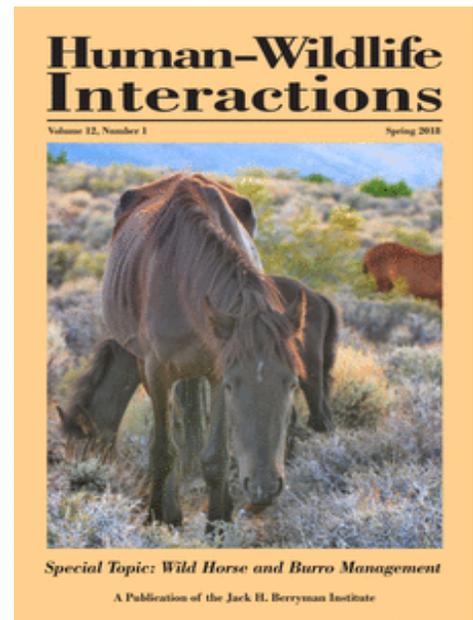


A 2013 survey of 1,247 registered voters by Public Policy Polling, Raleigh, NC (information@publicpolling.com) reported that 71% of the respondents were aware that WHBs roamed western public rangelands, and 72% felt they should be protected. When respondents were asked if they thought the program was being managed efficiently; 62% agreed that it was not. Survey respondents were not informed that WHBs populations threatened the ecological balance of western rangelands, were impacting other legal multiple-uses of public lands, and that fertility control methods alone are not a viable option given the current herd sizes. In 2017, the Berryman Institute, Utah State University, hosted a Summit in Salt Lake City, Utah to discuss the "full implementation of the WFRHBA." Participation was by invitation and included over 250 representatives from 109 public, private, and tribal agencies and organizations. Summit

participants were concerned about the impact of overabundant free-roaming equid population numbers on rangeland resources. They believed that fertility control and adoptions alone could not manage populations and mitigate resource impacts. All respondents, whether those who attended the 2017 Summit or those that responded to the Public Polling Policy Surveys expressed dissatisfaction with the current program status quo. To date, no rigorous study of U.S. public attitudes and knowledge regarding the management of WHBs has been completed. Subsequent the Summit, the Berryman Institute, Utah State University, published a special issue of Human-Wildlife Interactions on the management of wild horse and burros.

<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/hwi/vol12/iss1/>

Human–Wildlife Interactions (HWI) is the only scientific journal dedicated specifically to publishing manuscripts that report research, management case studies, and policy perspectives designed to enhance the professional management of human–wildlife conflicts.





Free-roaming equid habitat degradation; and the Science of foraging management

► Scientists and land managers generally agree that a critical point in habitat degradation has been reached.

The status quo cannot continue, otherwise it will jeopardize future management and use options for many public lands.

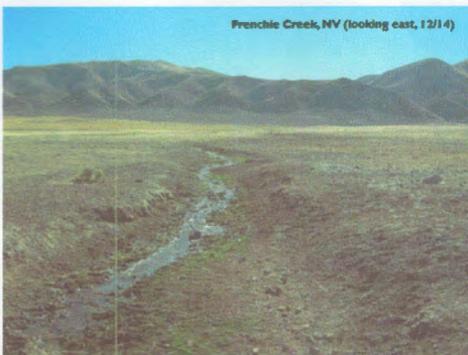
“We have dysfunctionality in the box, we can make the box bigger by taking away more land and forage from wildlife and livestock, but then we would just have more dysfunctionality in an even bigger box. This would buy us time, but eventually natural regulation will take place and horses could die by the thousands.”

Professor, Barry L. Perryman

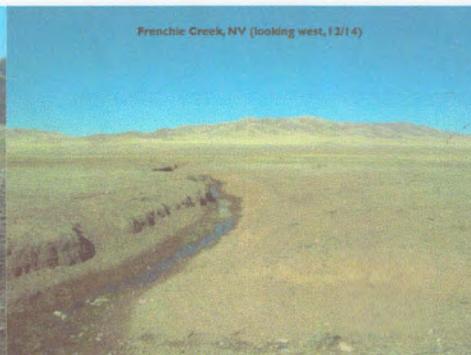
► The current management paradigm is failing. Rangelands, wildlife, and wild horses and burros are at risk of further degradation and death by starvation, and dehydration.



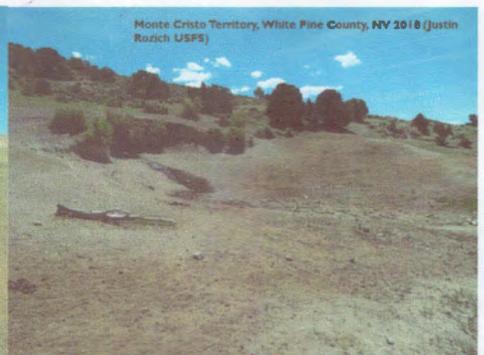
► What does overpopulation of one species mean for other species that depend upon shared habitat areas?



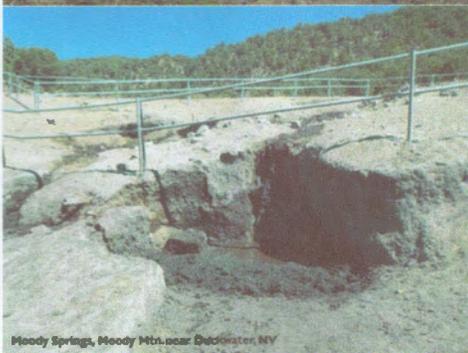
French Creek, NV (looking east, 12/14)



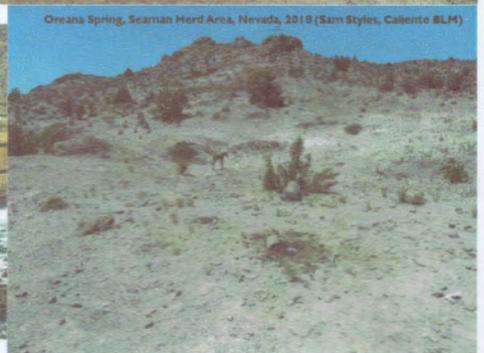
French Creek, NV (looking west, 12/14)



Moate Cristo Territory, White Pine County, NV 2018 (Justin Rozich USFS)

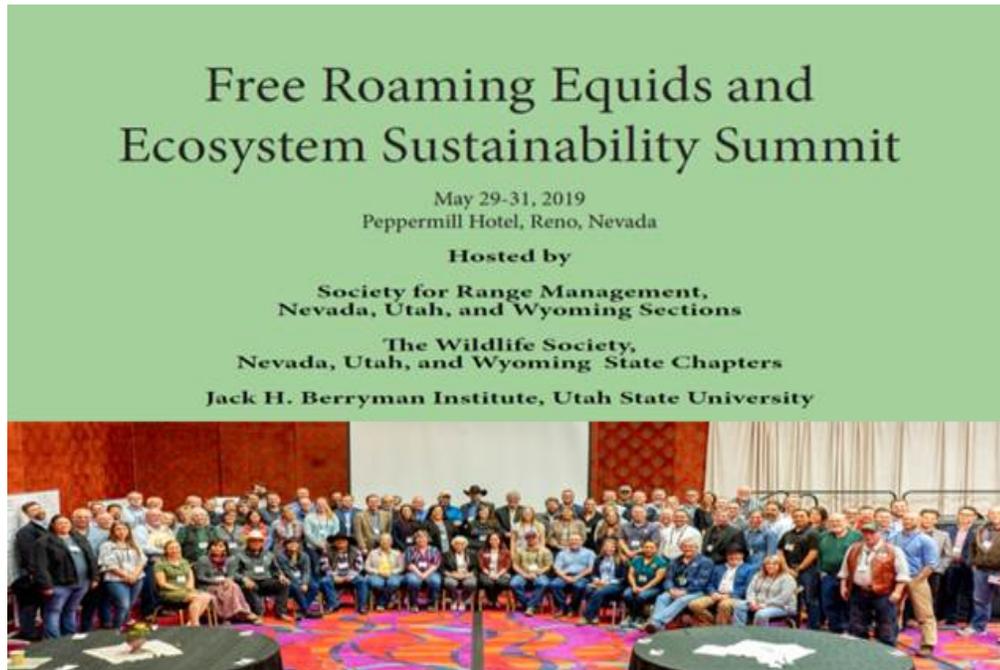


Moody Springs, Moody Mtn. near Dutchwater, NV



Oreana Spring, Seaman Herd Area, Nevada, 2018 (Sam Styles, Caliente BLM)

2019 Free-roaming Equid and Ecosystem Sustainability Summit



Delegates from over 90 different organizations convened at the Free-Roaming Equids and Ecosystem Sustainability Summit, held May 29-31, 2019 in Reno, Nevada in search of common ground to achieve the goal of “healthy herds on healthy rangelands.” The Summit was hosted by The Wildlife Society, the Society for Range Management, the Berryman Institute, and Nevada Bighorns Unlimited. The purpose of the Summit was “to

develop a stakeholder-based comprehensive communication strategy and processes to managing free-roaming equids in concert with other public lands multiples-use to achieve western rangeland ecosystem sustainability.” The delegates shared the goal of sustaining ‘Healthy Herds on Healthy Rangelands’. They also agreed to seek wide public support and a vision for solutions that are agreeable to all the organizations and individuals represented by Summit delegates and society at large. The delegates recognized that there is not one single solution, but that all solutions must be economically, biologically, ecologically, and ethically practical. They also recognized that the solutions must fully engage state legislatures, the U.S. Congress, interested non-governmental organizations, and private individuals in funding innovative ideas to be tested, and practical alternatives to be implemented that represent the values and desires of diverse public stakeholders, and are within the purview and management authority of the BLM, USFS, Native American Tribes, and the states.

The Reno Summit fostered a “non-political” grassroots movement now known as the Free-Roaming Equid and Ecosystem Sustainability Network or FREES. FREES seeks to enhance communication and engage diverse stakeholder groups in meaningful dialogue as we work together to realize a common goal of “healthy herds on healthy rangelands.” Participation in FREES is open to all individuals and organizations, regardless of perspectives. FREES seeks to integrate sound science with local knowledge, human perceptions, and values into a collaborative national network of information sharing, planning, and action. FREES is committed to seeking to better understand and respect individual opinions while striving to develop meaningful, actionable objectives to be implemented judiciously, compassionately, humanely, and expeditiously. FREES endorses diversity and seeks to engage diverse publics in developing solutions that are consensus based and agreeable to the preponderance of public land and free-roaming equid stakeholders. FREES also recognizes that there is not one single solution, and as such strives to create innovative and practical strategies that are scientifically sound and are within the purview and management authority of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the USDA Forest Service, Native American Tribes, and the states. To fund the strategies, FREES recognizes that the U.S. Congress and Executive Branch, state legislatures, non-governmental organizations, and private individuals must be fully engaged. As there are multiple coalitions and groups convening to address the needs of equids, it should be clarified that FREES delegates are participating in the process as representative of different interested agencies and organizations and not as members of the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board.

Areas of potential agreement:

Free-roaming horses and burros must be managed in a manner that is respectful of animal welfare, all other multiple-use on public lands, and recognition that rangeland health must be maintained.
Each area inhabited by free-roaming horses and burros is unique and should be managed and prioritized for action based on their ecological state, current free-roaming horse and burro populations, and health of land and animals.
Most HMAs inhabited by WHBs exceeds ecological carrying capacity
Gathers are the only means for removing excess WHBs and thus should integrate fertility control options with animal removal
Management actions must be prioritized that achieve an ecologically sustainable management level of free-roaming horses and burros through non-lethal means. To accomplish this will require a significant initial investment that will decrease over time as more efficient fertility control methods become available and horse and numbers in long-term holding facilities decrease through adoption and natural mortality.
Free-roaming horse and burro fertility management research must be supported to develop new techniques that may be applicable to unique HMA, tribal or state, management conditions.
The application of existing fertility control methods should be used based on efficacy unique to the WHBs HMAs and areas inhabited by free-roaming horses and burros
Stakeholder inability to achieve broad consensus and actions are likely to predicate actions and policies that are unacceptable across the spectrum of stakeholders.
Unified messaging to the U. S. Congress and the public is essential to better inform them about the WHB and other free-roaming horse and burro management needs, exponential growth potential of the herds and corresponding exponential ecological damage and gain support for long-term funding.



Photo (above) is of three bands of horses waiting to water at an impacted waterhole on the Pine Nut Herd Management Area near Reno, NV. In 2017, the population estimate was 694 horses; 258% of the appropriate management level of 118-179 horses.



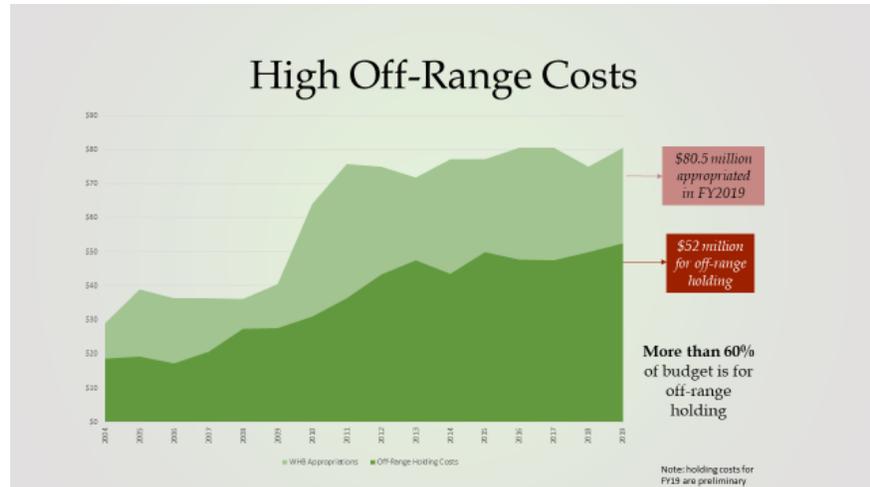
Public/Private Partnership: An economically, biologically, ecologically, and ethically practical Option

The current management paradigm is failing. Rangelands, wildlife, and wild horses are being adversely affected.

The 2019 cost of off-range holding is \$52 million or \$1,040 per animal. With 60,000 excess animals on-range above AML the total animals requiring off-range care grows to 107,000 animals.

The cost will accumulate to at least \$2.2 billion in 20 years. Just for Off-Range Animals

These are actual costs of the program just for holding at WHB numbers today.



A different means of funding care of off-range horses is necessary.

Novel markets through a Public/Private partnership offers numerous benefits:

- Shifts majority of the burden from BLM (govt.) to private sector
- Opens BLM off-range short term holding facilities to allow for necessary gathers of excess horses in emergency and non-emergency situations
- Increases BLM's ability to manage on-range populations
- Tax credits would provide funding for care of animals by private entities
- Any US tax payer could provide funding through a charitable contribution
- Business tax credits could be either refundable or non-refundable
- Tax Credits sunset in 20+/- years with attrition of animals by natural death
- Avoids unlimited sale and euthanizing excess animals – **Socially acceptable and politically feasible**

Doing nothing is not an option when Federal land management agencies are charged with maintaining the health of wild horse herds and the land on which they depend by multiple laws.



Free Roaming Equids
and Ecosystem
Sustainability Network

Moody Spring destroyed by horses near Eureka NV. No Cattle for 10+ years



Horses & wildlife competing for water



Gary McCuin
Extension Rangeland Specialist, UNR
Eureka, NV
mccuing@unce.unr.edu



Free Roaming Equids
and Ecosystem
Sustainability Network