

## **Population Working Group Meeting Notes March 30, 2022**

### **Present:**

Angie Jensen  
Celeste Carlisle  
Eric Thacker  
Stephanie Boyles Griffin  
Mark Fraker  
Kayla Grams  
Esther Rubin  
Doug Busselman  
Kim Frank  
Teresa Drotar  
David Stoner  
Sarah King  
Rick Karcich

Celeste and Eric updated the group on the Department of Interior's database, "Atlas." This will be an accessible map highlighting areas of BLM lands where conservation has been successful, ongoing, or needed. Public comments were due some time ago, but are still welcome. If the population working group was interested in submitting comments, Celeste could facilitate the effort. No one seemed to jump at the chance.

The remainder of the meeting was spent discussing potential fertility control topics for the October Summit in St. George, Utah.

### Fertility Control Summit Topics:

Mark suggested alternatives for holding. With numbers potentially increasing for animals coming off the range, where was holding available? How could this be accomplished beyond pens and corrals?

Stephanie noted that hearing from BLMers "on the ground" was important. We may not be aware of the real obstacles they face.

Teresa talked about the need for longer term, easier-to-administer fertility control, as well as consistent funding. In fact, Forest Service does not have specific funding for wild horse management. She also mentioned the lack of ability to move animals out of federal holding.

Esther reminded us that with non-lethal management, numbers off range will continue to increase. What is needed? What will those numbers be? When will we see plateaus? Is there modeling that helps us to understand what happens where?

Doug suggested a report from BLM about their fertility control management. He understands that they collect some animals, remove some, and administer some fertility control to animals returned to the range. What are the details? How are animals monitored? Is boosting or holding to boost a problem?

Celeste talked about the need for accurate, stringent fertility control programs. These programs are not simple, and it isn't fair to assume that everyone in the wild horse and burro programs has resources to address every nuance of administering a meaningful fertility control program. How can this be accomplished?

Eric suggested that State specialists be invited to walk through these programs, and that a bottom-up, as opposed to top-down, system is likely better. Additionally, are there deficiencies (budget being an obvious one) that limit abilities to either begin or maintain fertility control?

Doug thought perhaps a panel to compare strategies regarding the above would be good.

Esther and Eric talked about monitoring fertility control projects and wondered how effectively this was being done, and whether it had been assessed, or if outside sources could assist with this. Esther pointed out that adaptive management requires monitoring.

Sarah said that USGS does monitor 3 HMAs, but it is challenging. Knowing individual horses is difficult. Generally speaking, monitoring is done via aerial surveys and assumptions can be made about percent growth rate (and fertility control success) because of counts.

Celeste said that there are excellent opportunities with volunteers and programs that have been ongoing with BLM or FS to work with fertility control in accessible HMAs or Territories, but that there is an inherent lack of trust between so many stakeholders and the agencies that really utilizing data from these groups doesn't seem to occur.

Kayla pointed out that many herds are wild and remote. Access is difficult so it's hard to know if fertility control is working or not. You have to have meticulous data.

Doug wanted to know if there had been any research projects with different variables for when, and at what levels, is fertility control effective?

Celeste and Stephanie answered that some modeling has been able to predict some of this, but empirical data is needed to ground truth some of this modeling and be truly predictive (and helpful to managers).

Doug wondered if there was a good case study to present and Sarah answered that USGS has put in a proposal to BLM for just that.

**Reminders:**

Pathways Human Dimensions Conference – May 1-4, 2022  
Bremerton, Washington  
<https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/pathways/>

9<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Wildlife Fertility Control – May 23-25, 2022  
Colorado Springs, Colorado  
<https://www.wildlifefertilitycontrol.org/2022-conference/>

FREES Annual Summit – October 14-15, 2022  
St. George, Utah

NEXT POPULATION WORKING GROUP MEETING  
Wednesday, April 27, 2022  
12:30 PM MOUNTAIN