



WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

Matthew H. Mead
Governor of Wyoming
Chairman

Steve Bullock
Governor of Montana
Vice Chair

James D. Ogsbury
Executive Director

Headquarters

1600 Broadway
Suite 1700
Denver, CO 80202

303-623-9378
Fax 303-534-7309

Washington, D.C.

400 N. Capitol Street, N.W.
Suite 376
Washington, D.C. 20001

202-624-5402
Fax 202-624-7707

www.westgov.org

January 27, 2016

Neil Kornze
Director
U.S. Bureau of Land Management
1849 C Street N.W., Room 5665
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Kornze:

We are writing to request additional information and clarification regarding the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) administration of the National Wild Horse and Burro Program. As stated in Western Governors' Association (WGA) Policy Resolution [2015-01](#), *Wild Horse and Burro Management*, Western Governors believe that burgeoning wild horse and burro populations along with the inability of federal agencies to adequately manage these populations presents an urgent concern for western rangelands and ecosystems.

Western Governors firmly believe that:

- Wild Horse and Burro populations should be managed within established Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs).
- AMLs should be developed, monitored and adjusted using a transparent and science-based process that uses the best available population estimates.
- Collaboration should be increased between state agencies, federal agencies and private stakeholders regarding population data and monitoring, public education and adoption programs.
- New and innovative management options should be utilized, including fertility control methods and alternative food sources at short-term animal holding facilities.

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Attached please find Western Governors' substantive questions regarding these issues. A similar list was provided to BLM staff in advance of the WGA's Winter Meeting, held in Las Vegas on December 4-5, 2015.

We are committed to responsible wild horse and burro management on western rangelands and look forward to working more closely with BLM towards that end. We hope that the BLM's detailed and substantive answers to these questions are a first step toward that goal.

Sincerely,



Matthew H. Mead
Governor of Wyoming
Chairman, WGA



Steve Bullock
Governor of Montana
Vice Chair, WGA

Attachment

cc: Honorable Sally Jewell, Secretary, U.S. Department of Interior

ATTACHMENT

Western Governors' Association Questions and Comments on the BLM's Management of Wild Horse and Burro Populations

While the list below is not intended to represent the entirety of western states' concerns or input, unresolved questions relating to the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Programs include:

- The total AML for all western states is set at 26,648 animals. As of March 1, 2015, there were an estimated 58,150 animals on western rangeland – more than double the BLM-determined level. Relative to AML:
 - What are BLM's plans to reduce herd sizes to prescribed AMLs?
 - Given existing and expected budgets, what is the timeframe to implement plans that reduce herd sizes to prescribed AMLs?
 - How can states be more involved in annual gather planning discussions?
 - Wild horse and burro populations above prescribed AMLs can cause negative environmental and rangeland impacts. How can these impacts be better acknowledged, measured and incorporated into management decisions?
 - What are the impediments to BLMs plans to reduce herds to prescribed AMLs and implement fertility control treatments?
 - What other resources does BLM need?
 - Does BLM have necessary authority to direct funding based on a prioritization of needs?
- The total capacity of all BLM off-range holding facilities is 54,549 animals. As of November 2015, these facilities held 47,303 animals. Given the rapid growth of wild horse and burro populations, is BLM considering adding temporary off-range pastures and corrals?
- Wild horse and burro herds can impact the management and conservation planning of other species, such as the Greater sage-grouse. How will BLM work

with states to expedite the development of herd management area plans for wild horses and burros occupying sagebrush habitat?

- What is the status of BLM's efforts with the U.S. Geological Survey's Fort Collins Science Center to develop methods to achieve greater accuracy in wild horse population estimates?
- The BLM has proposed a knowledge and values study regarding the management of wild horses and burros. What is the status of that study?
- What does BLM do to actively manage wild horse and burro populations, excluding roundups of excess populations pursuant to lawsuits or experimental fertility control efforts in some areas?
 - Does the BLM consider or implement sterilization for populations where fertility control has proven ineffective?
- In the past two appropriations cycles, congressional report language has encouraged BLM to implement the recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) 2013 study, *Using Science to Improve the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program: A Way Forward*. The NAS recommends the implementation of fertility control programs to limit the uncontrolled growth of wild horse and burro populations. What is the status of these fertility control programs, and what steps has the agency taken to implement the NAS recommendations? How can states assist in the development and expansion of such programs?
- Relative to BLM's adoption program:
 - What is BLM doing to expand adoption efforts?
 - Is BLM exploring alternatives to adoption to reduce numbers of wild horses in off-range facilities? If so, what are those alternatives?
 - Horses placed in an adoption program were recently sold for slaughter. How can BLM and states work to ensure adopted horses are not sent to slaughter?
- Many states perform their own wild horse and burro monitoring. How can the data exchange between state and federal agencies be improved?