

PLANNING, MONITORING, AND INVENTORYING POPULATIONS AND HABITAT

BACKGROUND

The Board reviewed current program guidance and procedures to determine if they are effective for implementing program policy. In order for the program to succeed, a focus must be placed on management on the range that includes monitoring and inventorying of both the populations and habitat.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend to the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior that the BLM and Forest Service implement consistent inventorying and monitoring procedures that will provide information to determine wild horse and burro populations and herbivore impacts to achieve habitat objectives and desired plant communities as described in the following guidelines.

Planning and Monitoring Populations

That wild horses and burros are an integral part of public lands and must be managed under the principle of multiple use with integrated, coordinated decisionmaking.

That multiple-use, sustained yield management objectives must be stated in Resource Management Plans (RMP's) and focus on achieving, maintaining or restoring a thriving range condition that contributes to species diversity.

Objectives must be based on public input, existing resource conditions and issues, and must be measurable, attainable, and realistic.

That population and habitat are so intertwined that planning and monitoring must include the following:

- a. Behavioral observations of wild horses, burros, and other herbivores.
- b. Map spatial overlap information for the purpose of showing where competition occurs in juxtaposition to damaged areas; map 1 to include seasonal movement and distribution of wild horses and burros; map 2 to include distribution of livestock; map 3 to include the use pattern map of vegetation; map 4 to include seasonal movements and distribution of major wildlife species.
- c. Collection of consistent census data on a regular basis, using the most appropriate wildlife censusing methods for the habitat and situation.
- d. Determination of minimum population levels to serve as a threshold (based on viable gene pools, herd integrity, and population dynamics information) below which the population in a given area cannot be removed.
- e. Age structure and sex ratio information which would assist in making determinations for population adjustments. The information should not only determine what to take off but, more importantly, what should be left behind.
- f. Update land-use plans as needed based on current monitoring data.

Monitoring and Inventorying Habitat

That the purpose of monitoring is to measure the impacts of wild horses and burros and other grazers on rangelands in order to provide information that allows sound management decisions.

That habitat must be managed as an ecosystem which takes into account all components, and the vegetation is to be managed not only for its forage value but its values as watershed protection and fish-and-wildlife habitat.

That BLM field manuals and program guidances be reviewed for compliance with actions set forth by IBLA.

That habitat monitoring must include the following:

- a. Assess utilization by each herbivore species in terms of area of use and seasons of use.
- b. Collect quantifiable data which will determine where and when competition occurs.
- c. Collect technical data which will identify range conflicts and areas of actual competition and initiate a coordinated, integrated management approach.
- d. Establish timeframes for evaluating monitoring data that results in multiple-use decision making, planning, and management.
- e. Categorize objectives, moving from broad objectives (goals) to quantifiable objectives. Monitoring requires sound objectives and management constraints, which must be expressed in the RMP, quantified objectives in the AMP, and all management practices in the field manual.
- f. Develop species-specific habitat evaluation standards and practices handbook agency-wide.

RATIONALE

We recognize that the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service can manage the range ecosystem with all its unique and diverse forms of plants, animals, terrain, and climate, given proper methodology and adequate qualified staff. With that recognition comes the need for improved and formative management of wild horses and burros and its resulting contribution to the animal diversity of the public lands within the established Wild Horse and Burro Management Areas.

Proper management plans for a given area require a strong information base. Monitoring should focus on the overall impact of grazing pressures on the many components of the watershed. The utilization levels obtained should be used as one of the tools to achieve established goals and objectives in the agencies' desired plant community. There is a need for the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service to apply established methods with a consistency that can be recognized, understood, and defended.

It is assumed that the increased expenditures for on-the-ground data and information will reduce the verbal and legal conflicts.