

BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program On-Range Branch Highlights
National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Meeting | October 4-6, 2022

Table 1: Fiscal Year 2022 On-Range Operations Summary*

Animals Gathered	Animals Removed	Animals Treated	Surveys Conducted
20,851	19,011	1,558	63 HMAs, 10 HAs

*Not final. Figures are estimates as of September 19, 2022

Population: As of March 1, 2022, the BLM estimated there were approximately 82,384 wild horses and burros on BLM-managed public lands. Though this estimate remains three times the appropriate management level of 26,785 animals, it marks the second consecutive year of decline. Severe drought across the West continues to amplify the impacts overpopulated wild horse and burro herds have on the land and the animals, and it underscores the urgency of the BLM’s work to reduce overpopulation.

Gathers/Removals: As of September 19, 2022 the BLM has removed at least 19,011 wild horses and burros from overpopulated herds across the West as part of its efforts to achieve and maintain appropriate management levels. The BLM continues to develop a FY2023 gather schedule, which is dependent on budget limitations and Congressional appropriations.

The BLM is committed to transparency and continues to invite the public and media to observe helicopter gather operations. A new Gather Observation Protocol was published to help improve opportunities for the public to safely observe gathers while avoiding disruption of operations or the experience of other observers.

Fertility Control: The BLM continues to work towards implementing more fertility control treatments with the goal of slowing wild horse and burro herd growth, especially for herds that are at or close to appropriate management level. In FY2022, the BLM completed 1,558 treatments. FY2022 treatment numbers are expected to increase as the BLM collects records. A complete total should be available by the end of October.

The BLM intends to increase the number of fertility control applications in FY2023 through the use of a new contract (currently under development) that would specifically focus on gathering, treating, temporarily holding and then releasing animals back to public lands. Gathering animals for treatment is necessary in herd management areas that are more remote and less accessible.

The BLM also intends to increase field darting operations in FY2023. Field darting can be most effective in accessible herds. The BLM hosted an internal training workshop in May 2022 that helped train and certify BLM fertility control applicators, and a second workshop is planned for FY2023. The BLM has also released a grant opportunity to attract new public and private partners who can help expand treatments, which closes January 31, 2023.

Research: The “BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program 2021 Strategic Research Plan,” released in October 2021, identifies two highest-priority topics for BLM-funded WHB research. The highest priority is research into humane, long-lasting mare fertility control methods. The next highest priority is to address the relationship between wild horses and burros and their environment, including as related to climate change. In November 2021 the BLM solicited research proposals to address these topics. In the spring of 2022, proposals from academia, government research agencies, and nonprofits were reviewed by external panels of subject matter experts and by an interagency internal panel. In July, the BLM shared with the public its analyses of three research projects into potentially long-lasting fertility control methods in a



preliminary Environmental Assessment. The BLM is still considering public comments and has not yet issued a final EA or decision record. The BLM will support two projects that address ecology and climate change. The agency also approved two other WHB research project proposals in FY22 that do not require agency funding. The WHB program research coordinator will provide more details in a presentation to the board.