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Top 5 things to know about the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program

May 1, 2025

Wild horses and burros are among the most iconic species roaming the American landscape so ensuring their well-being requires more than just basic care – it demands a comprehensive, thoughtful and science-driven approach. The Bureau of Land Management's [Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program](#) was developed to ensure these cherished animals receive the best possible care throughout their entire journey, from gather to adoption.

Here are the top five things you need to know about the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program and how it works to protect the health and safety of wild horses and burros under BLM care:

1. The Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program formalizes humane care, handling and treatment practices. WHE Note: It does not formalize policy. Formalization requires public participation. BLM uses the word “formalize” to mean they wrote something down.

The program brings together long-standing practices for the humane treatment of wild horses and burros into a single, consistent framework. By consolidating standard

operating procedures into one comprehensive program, the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program promotes consistency and accountability across all wild horse and burro operations.

WATCH: [The Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program on Facebook Reels](#)

2. External experts helped shape the program's standards.

WHE NOTE: UC Davis developed Air Quality and Heat Index Standards for equines that NEVER made it into CAWP. UC Davis guidelines for equine welfare are not the same as BLM CAWP. How much UC Davis was paid was never disclosed.

The BLM worked with veterinarians and partnered with animal welfare experts from the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of California, Davis to develop the program's science-based standards. The BLM's deep experience with the unique circumstances of handling wild horses and burros was also instrumental.



BLM staff handling wild burros at an adoption event.

3. Training is required for everyone involved.

WHE Note: "Training" is an online test you can take with the CAWP standards open in another window.

All BLM employees, contractors, partners and volunteers who interact with wild horses and burros must complete animal welfare training, typically on an annual basis. This ensures everyone is equipped to meet the program's high standards for animal care.



BLM employees receive training and guidance in Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program assessments at the Burns Off-Range Corrals in Oregon.

4. Assessments ensure compliance and drive improvements.

Formal assessments are conducted at gathers, adoption events, and off-range facilities by rotating teams of interdisciplinary subject matter experts. These audits help the BLM track compliance and identify opportunities to strengthen operations.

WHE Note: Only a few roundups are assessed each year. No roundups were assessed prior to 2021. The CAWP team is only onsite 2-3 days at a roundup that might last 6 weeks.

In 2024, only one BLM facility was “assessed.”

Regardless of repetitive violations of standards by both roundup contractors and facilities, there are no consequences.



BLM employee assessing unloading of wild horse at an adoption event.

5. The program evolves based on data and feedback.

The Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program is not static. Data collected from assessments are used to refine and improve various elements of the Wild Horse and Burro Program to ensure first-class care for America's living legends.

WHE note: Documentation gained through FOIA (and litigation) show there has never been any review of welfare standards.



A healthy yearling at a BLM corral.

The Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program is central to the BLM's mission of protecting and managing wild horses and burros. With science, training, and compassion at its core, the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program ensures these iconic animals are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Story by: *Jason Luttermann, Public Affairs Specialist*

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