

National Wild Horse & Burro Advisory Board

January 7-8, 2025

Volume 1

Day 1 Meeting Minutes

U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2025 3

WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER 3
BLM DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICIAL REMARKS 3
U.S. FOREST SERVICE REGION 5, WELCOME AND UPDATES 18
APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: DECEMBER 2023 23
DISCUSSION: BLM AND USFS RESPONSES TO BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS FROM DECEMBER 2023 BOARD MEETING 23
BLM WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROGRAM UPDATE 28
U.S. FOREST SERVICE, WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROGRAM UPDATE 36
PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD (1) 38
U.S. FOREST SERVICE, WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROGRAM UPDATE (CONT.) 53
WILD HORSE AND BURRO PUBLIC DASHBOARD DEMONSTRATION UPDATE 55
POPEQUUS MODELING DEMONSTRATION 63
COMPREHENSIVE ANIMAL WELFARE PROGRAM UPDATE 74
ADVISORY BOARD DISCUSSION AND WRAP UP 80

This document is primarily a direct transcript of the meeting, captured using voice-recording technology. Text in italics represents narrative; roman text is recorded speech during the meeting. Recorded text was edited to correct grammatical errors and ensure reading comprehension.

Thursday, January 7,2025

Welcome and Call to Order

Bryant Kuechle, Facilitator, The Langdon Group

Mr. Kuechle welcomed attendees to the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board meeting and introduced himself and his role as a neutral third-party facilitator.

Ms. Celeste Carlisle, Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Chair

Ms. Carlisle welcomed the Advisory Board members (Table 1). She called the meeting to order. The members of the Board introduced themselves.

TABLE 1:

Board Member	Representing
Ms. Celeste Carlisle	Wild Horse & Burro Advocacy
Commissioner James French	Natural Resource Management
Commissioner Varlin Higbee (virtual)	Livestock Raising
Dr. Gwenllian Iacona, PhD	Wildlife Management
Dr. Sarah King, PhD	Wild Horse & Burro Research
Dr. Tom Lenz, DVM (virtual)	Veterinary Medicine
Ms. Susan McAlpine (virtual)	Humane Advocacy
Commissioner Tammy Pearson	Public Interest (Equine Behavior)
Dr. Barry Perryman, PhD	Public Interest (NRM Special Knowledge)

BLM Designated Federal Official Remarks

Mr. Kuechle thanked the Board and introduced the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Assistant Director for Resources and Planning, Mr. Sharif Branham, as the designated Federal Official for the BLM and USFS Service meeting.

Mr. Sharif Branham, Assistant Director, BLM

Mr. Branham: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this meeting. I apologize for not being there in person, but recent events conspired against my ability to get to Sacramento, I appreciate the efforts you've made to be there in person. Thank you for your dedication to this Board and to the wellbeing of the wild horses and burros. My name is Sharif Branham, and I am the BLM Assistant Director for Resources and Planning and the designated federal official for this meeting of the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board and it's a privilege to be here with you all today.

I wanted to start this off by acknowledging a few of the Board members. You've heard some of what I'm going to say because the members just introduced themselves, but I'll run through it just to put a finer point on it. First, I'd like to welcome back Commissioner Jim French and Commissioner Tammy Pearson to the Board. Jim was reappointed for a third 3-year term to the position representing Natural Resource Management and Commissioner Pearson was reappointed for a second 3-year term to the position of public interest with special knowledge of equine behavior. I'd also like to congratulate and welcome Dr. King who is starting her first 3-year term representing wild horse and burro research.

We're glad to have you all you appointed and engaged in this Board and thank you for your service. As you all know, and we'll discuss through this meeting, the Wild Horse and Burro is at a critical juncture. The BLM and US Forest Service are obligated by the 1971 Wild Horse and Burro Act to manage and protect these cherished symbols of our shared history and to ensure that they thrive as a part of our natural ecological balance on public lands.

However, today there are 3 times as many horses and burros on public lands, as is healthy and sustainable for the lands where the herds are disrupting the careful balance that ensures public lands and the animals that call them home remain healthy and productive for future generations. Chronic overpopulation severely strains forage and water resources, damages the land, threatens the health of wild horses and burros and other wildlife. This is especially true in areas where herds are as much as 6 or 8 times over the appropriate management levels and have been for some time.

Keeping the herds and their land healthy is at the core of our mission. Reducing overpopulation is top priority for the Bureau and our partners and I look forward to having a robust conversation around that topic, but I want to acknowledge that how we manage these animals is also very important. Not only do we have to protect the health of the herd and the land, but we must always mandate humanely and always with the animal's best interest at heart. That's why I'm so proud of the progress that we've made and continue to make, in standing up our comprehensive animal welfare program, which you'll hear more about through this meeting.

Not only does this program ensure the wild horses and burros are well cared for, but it demonstrates to you all in public that what I see every day, how dedicated the people in this program are to the health and well-being of the animals under their care.

As committed and capable as our team is in the scope of our mission, it requires that others step up and work together. We've taken significant steps in recent years to involve more public-private partnerships in the management of these animals both on-range and after they've entered into off-range system. Our partners are located across the country and work on everything from guarding and monitoring animals to training and finding them good homes. Many individuals work long hours in extreme conditions, some even volunteering their time. I want to thank each and every one of them for their tireless and dedicated efforts to the program and to these animals. I truly believe public involvement is at the heart of the solution to the challenges we face. There's a reason why the Wild-Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act highlights the importance of expert consultation to ensure informed decision-making.

Other federal laws are also clear. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act and Federal Advisory Committee Act underscore the value of public engagement and citizen input in managing our public lands. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board stands as a model of this principle of public engagement and consent, ensuring that we at the BLM and Forest Service benefit from diverse perspectives, expertise and thereby the animals and the land benefit as well.

I encourage you all to think creatively. Bold ideas are needed to navigate these challenges facing the wild horses and burros. Let's explore new approaches and respect diverse perspectives. We all share the goal of achieving what's best for these animals and the lands that they call home. With that, I thank Celeste, I'll pass it back to you.

Ms. Carlisle thanked the Assistant Director and turned the conversation back to Mr. Kuechle to facilitate administrative updates and further introductions from BLM Staff as follows.

Paul McGuire, Off-range Branch Chief, Wild Horse and Burro Program, BLM

Mr. McGuire: Good morning, everybody. It's good to be here. My name is Paul McGuire. I'm the off-range branch chief for the Wild Horse and Burro headquarters program out of Norman, Oklahoma. I was glad to be able to make it here with all of the disruptions that were happening with travel and good to see a lot of folks here. I'm representing our division chief this week. Our division Chief, Holle' Waddell, has been on a special assignment for quite a number of months and is expected hopefully to return to the role as Division Chief full-time here in the next few weeks. But in the meantime, I'm representing her and the program. We have a number of staff with us today and hopefully I don't miss anybody. If I do, please throw something at me. Obviously, we've got Dorothea Boothe, I think everyone on the Board is familiar with Dorothea, she has been very involved in coordinating these meetings for many years and so we appreciate her being here.

Also, I'll note joining us online is Allison Niebauer, she's a new hire with the program and is in our Wild Horse and Burro Coordinator position. She'll be carrying forward with coordinating these Board meetings. I think many of you had an opportunity to engage with her leading up to this one. We're grateful to have Allison on Board.

We've got Jason Luderman with us, our lead public affairs specialist. He does a phenomenal job and he's being assisted by Sarah Holm on detail with the program. Serena Camacho, our administrative assistant who does everything all the time everywhere. Hi Serena. And we appreciate everything she does. Meredith Kueck is with us. She'll be presenting a demo of

our public portal later during the meeting, so I appreciate her being here. Jerri Bertola is here as well. Our CAWP [Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program] coordinator, she heads up a program that we know is of great interest to the Board and the public.

Dr. Paul Griffin will be presenting later. He's in the galley there. Appreciate him being here. And then though Dr. Al Kane is not BLM, he's APHIS [USDA Animal & Planet Health Inspection Service], he's an integral part of our team. He's also here as well. If I've missed anyone on the BLM team, my apologies. Chad is back there. I think he got a big, huge grin on his face. Hey. Chad. He's acting in our on-range program manager capacity right now. You may know that our permanent on-range branch chief, Scott Fleur just recently retired within the last week or so. Chad is filling in behind Scott in the interim and doing a fantastic job. Who else have we got back there? Lemitchel is our outreach specialist. Everyone say hello to Lemitchel when you get a chance. I think that's the headquarters team. I know we've got some other BLM folks here who'll be introducing themselves, I'm sure. But that is it for me for now.

Dr. Teresa Drotar, USDA Forest Service

Dr. Drotar, DVM: Hello everyone, I'm Teresa Drotar. I am the Forest Service Wild Horse and Burro Program Lead. Not sitting here, is Chuck Oliver who's been delayed by weather and travel. He should be here later. I'll introduce him even though you can't see him. He is the Assistant Director. Then the only other people that we have in the room are Madeline Levy and Charlene Johnston who are from Region 5. You're going to see them in a little bit talking about Region 5. We don't go by states in the Forest Service, but that's essentially California and they're up from Alturas, California, so you'll get to meet them in person and that's all we have here today.

Ms. Carlisle: Thank you everybody. Just a little bit of housekeeping, so you're thinking about it. I'll try to remember right before the break to remind you. If you are here and you signed up for the field trip on Thursday, we had some email issues and we only have one person officially on that docket, which seems strange. If you think you signed up, please see Dorothea Boothe at the break and we'll see what we can do. Because the Sheriff does background checks, we're not certain that that can happen in time at this point, but please, let's try to figure it out if you are interested in the field trip. Thank you. And we're back to you, Bryant.

Meeting Public Participation Protocol

Mr. Kuechle reviewed the procedural elements for public participation, stating that the BLM recognizes the value of public input and appreciates public interest in expressing themselves regarding matters of concern. He explained the process for registering to provide public comment, noting that there would be 2 designated opportunities to do so. Mr. Kuechle reviewed the day's agenda.

Mr. Kuechle: Once again, my name is Bryant Kuechle. I am the facilitator with the Langdon Group through the Department of Interior Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution Office. I'm here with a couple of my colleagues, Tracy Ortiz and Angela Singleton who will be providing support today and we're here to help just ensure the meeting runs smoothly, everybody has an opportunity to participate, and we will do that from a third-party neutral role.

I'm going to take a moment to review what we call the rules of the room. It's just some of the guidelines for everybody that's here from the public that are participating and attending, and then also go over a few housekeeping items before we really get into the meeting. I'm just going to go ahead and read this:

"The rules of the room: The BLM and the Forest Service recognize the value of public attendance at the Wild Horse and Burro National Advisory Board meetings and appreciate the public's interest in expressing themselves on matters of common concern."

"Most of the meeting is designed as a working meeting of the Board, with specific time slots set aside for public comment. Seating and presentation arrangements are primarily set for a Board meeting. The public is invited to the full meeting as observers, both in person and via webcam, which is how the majority of the public experiences the Board

proceedings. The BLM and the Forest Service are designating the following rules of the room, both to ensure a smooth meeting for all engaged and to ensure clear site lines for the webcam."

"Seating is available for all attendees. Anyone needing or wishing to stand will stand in the designated area behind the seats. So really off to the sides in this space. All attendees are to stay in the seating or standing area at all times unless addressing the Board during the public comment period. Speakers and other attendees will not approach the dais at any time without prior consent from the Chair of the meeting."

"Media will check in at the door and will be guided to the space designated for cameras which we have set aside to the side of the building there. Excuse me, side of the room here. No attendees will be allowed to place microphones, cameras, or other equipment in the space set aside for the Board meeting. All attendees will show mutual respect for each other and for speakers and for Board members. This includes refraining from using cell phones or talking while the meeting is in session. If anyone disrupts the meeting, they'll be asked to leave or be escorted out."

"Those wishing to address the Board will sign in at the door. Speakers will address their comments to the Board while seated at the designated speaker table here up front. Generally, speakers have 2 minutes each and are asked to be finished in the designated time to allow for the maximum number of individuals to express their viewpoint. And that's specific to the in-person commenters. We'll speak just a moment here about the commenting process in general."

"Attendees wishing to provide handouts to the Board will leave handouts with the BLM representative at the door. Handouts will not be brought to the speakers' table and no one will be allowed to approach the Board with handouts. Within the meeting room, attendees may not display signs, placards or other items that are likely to obscure the view of participants or disrupt the meeting. The Board will not respond to comments made during the public participation period. This should not be interpreted to mean the members of the Board agree or disagree with anything said. The Chair reserves the right to comment on any factual inaccuracies that may be shared during the public comment period. The BLM and the Forest Service commit to maintaining these rules for the benefit of all involved and appreciate everyone's cooperation with these rules."

So as mentioned, we have public comment times, 2 of them, one today right after lunch and one tomorrow. So that's a hybrid in a sense. We have the opportunity for people that are here in person to sign up and provide comment and we have room for that. It's also online. We ask that people that want to provide comment online do so in advance. Those slots have all been filled. So if you are interested in providing public comment at this stage, the opportunity exists in person. Our comment times both for today and tomorrow have been filled.

Some housekeeping items for those of you Board members here in person, I'll be keeping an eye on all of you if you have questions. I mean it's a small group so you can make contact with Celeste and kind of let her know as well. But I'll just keep an eye out. If you have a comment or you have a question, you can put your name up on end or kind of raise your hand and we'll be keeping an eye out for you and I'll go ahead and announce it. Who might have a question? If there's a lot of hands and a lot of interest, I'll try to indicate which order people put their hands up so we can do that and make sure everybody gets the opportunity to speak.

If you're online, we have a number of Board members online, so the best way to handle that is to use the electronic hand raising function. We'll have a computer in front of Tracy and I here and we'll keep an eye on it and then if we see your hand, we'll hop in and make sure that you get an opportunity to share what you would like.

Let's see, other housekeeping items, restrooms. The women's restroom is really easy. It's not too far out here. The men's restroom, you got to go basically almost outside and down a hallway and around another hallway. So, it's fun. Unless there's another one and I didn't find it. That's the situation there. So, I think that kind of covers it for housekeeping, it's pretty straightforward. What we do need to do though, because we do have some new Board members, we want to ensure that the leadership of the Board is reflective of the current Board. So, with that, we want to go through an election process.

So currently Celeste Carlisle is our Chairperson. We don't have a Vice Chair. Commissioner French was the previous Vice Chair, but he went off the Board. Now he's back on, so technically not currently a Vice Chair. I would like to put this out to the current Board if anyone would like to nominate themselves or another member of the Board to hold a position. Tammy?

Ms. Pearson: I'd like to nominate Celeste as Chairman.

Mr. Kuechle: Okay, I have a nomination for Celeste. Any other interests?

Ms. McAlpine: I'd like to second that please.

Mr. Kuechle: Okay, let's do a vote for Chair, we'll do just a quick aye and nay. All those in favor of Celeste Carlisle as the re-upping her appointment as Chairman person?

Ms. McAlpine: Amen.

Board: Aye. Aye.

Mr. Kuechle: Any nays? Okay, and Vice Chair, any nominations? Anyone self-interest or would like to nominate somebody?

Ms. Carlisle: I nominate Jim to be Vice Chair of this Board.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Second.

Mr. Kuechle: Okay. All those in favor?

Board: Aye. Aye. Aye.

Mr. Kuechle: All those opposed? Okay, good job. Elections are complete. I'm going to just take one more opportunity. Our designated official, Mr. Branham, if you had any other comments to share at this time before we move forward with introducing our representative that's here with us from the California State Office.

Mr. Branham: Thank you for the opportunity. I do not have any additional comments at this time.

Mr. Kuechle: Okay, great. Well, I'm going to go ahead then and introduce the Deputy State Director for Resources at BLM California. Liz Meyer-Shields, to come forward and provide some opening remarks.

Elizabeth Meyer-Shields, Deputy State Director for Natural Resources, BLM and Amy Dumas California Wild Horse and Burro State Lead, BLM

Ms. Meyer-Shields: All right, thank you Bryant. Good morning. On behalf of the BLM California State Director Joe Stout, I'd like to welcome everyone here in Sacramento in person and those of you who are watching and participating virtually. Joe would've liked to be here, but he had a conflict that took him down to Southern California this morning.

I am Elizabeth-Meyer Shields. I'm the BLM Deputy State Director for Natural Resources. I've been in this position for almost a year now and I'm pleased to welcome you here and join you today. Among other programs, my division includes the Wild Horse and Burro Program here in California. I'd like to acknowledge your service to the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board. I know your participation is voluntary and we're grateful for your involvement and interest in the protection and management of wild horses and burros on public lands. The diverse background and expertise of the

advisory Board members provide us with fresh ways of viewing resource management and that leads to sound management decisions.

We here at the BLM appreciate the challenges the Board faces when dealing with wildly different or widely different wild horse and burro issues in different states. Although each state has the same mission to maintain wild horses and burros and their habitats in good condition and implementing the wild free roaming horses and burros act, California has its own challenges with managing population growth of wild horse and burro herds and finding new adoption markets. BLM California hits every aspect of the Wild Horse and Burro program except for off-range pastures. We have 21 HMAs [Horse Management Areas], 2 preparation facilities, one training facility at a jail, a growing compliance team, and a long list of adopters. However, we do need help finding more good adopters, and so we encourage your suggestions to help us find good homes for our animals. Right now, our facilities at Ridgecrest and Litchfield are almost full.

If you or someone you know is thinking about taking home a wild one, please consider contacting those corrals to make an adoption appointment. Ridgecrest is bursting with burros and Litchfield has more horses than burros. We have about 2,500 horses and 2,700 burros on the range in California. We achieved our goal of reaching AML [Appropriate Management Level] for horses at Twin Peaks. If you want a Twin Peaks horse, now is a great time to adopt one of those highly desirable animals. They're known for their size, conformation and temperaments. And if you're not comfortable training an untouched horse, you can get a trained one from one of our partners, the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office in the Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center in Elk Grove, which is also known as R3C. The inmates at R3C saddle train horses for the public to adopt. The next adoption date will be announced shortly, but we expect it in the late winter or early spring.

We continue to monitor the horse and burro populations on the range, and we're fortunate to have 2 full-time and 2 collateral duty field specialists based in Eagle Lake, Ridgecrest, El Centro, and Needles, California.

BLM California is also providing administrative and technical guidance to the US Forest Service for their removal of their horses outside of Montgomery Pass Wild Horse Territory near Mono Lake. If you have any questions for me, please let me know. Otherwise, I am going to kick the discussion over to Amy Dumas, who's the BLM California Wild Horse and Burro Program Lead, and Amy's going to provide a more detailed discussion on BLM California's Wild Horse and Burro Program, and we'll share some numbers, positive stories, and list some of the challenges we face with managing America's wild horses and burros.

Ms. Dumas: Thank you, Liz. My name is as Liz said, Amy Dumas. I'm the BLM California Wild Horse and Burro State Lead. I've been in the program since 2000 and I've been in this job for 16 years, so I'm fairly familiar with what's happening in California. And just a brief bit about me since we did brief introductions. I've been around horses since I was 3, and I was an adopter before I actually came to work for BLM. And my background is in animal science and conservation biology. So, what we do here in the Wild Horse and Burro program is just kind of right up my alley as far as my academic training and general interests. Enough about me. Let's talk a little bit about the Wild Horse and Burro program. Before I get started, I want to thank everybody for coming here and the Board for being here.

We're happy to host you and show you our facility, the R3C facility on Thursday for those who are coming. And we'll get more information about that, times and places leaving and things like that when we get there. Or I mean later today.

I should have worn my glasses. As Liz had mentioned, in California we have 21 HMAs. These are our Northern California HMAs. You can see that some of them are actually in the state of Nevada, which is kind of hard to see on this slide, but the stuff going to the east is actually in Northwestern Nevada, but they're considered California HMAs, and we manage the animals there.

And in, next slide, in California, in the northern part of the states, we are dealing mostly with horses, and we also have one herd of burros up there, which also means that in Twin Peaks, this is where we have horses and burros living together.

We also have mules, wild mules on range. And actually, in that top right photo, you'll see a mule, hopefully, if you can see it on your screens, there is a mule in that picture.

Ms. Amy Dumas: Hopefully, if you can see it on your screens, there is a mule in that picture. Most of the issues in Northern California are resource-based issues with looking for feed and water. These areas are pretty remote. That's okay.

And in Southern California is where most of our burros reside, and we do have one herd of horses down there in our Centennial HMA. And that Centennial HMA is on the China Lakes Naval Air Weapons Station, it's not open to the public, but we do also have mules down there.

The issues that we face down south are primarily. Here's some of our burros in our HMA. It's a hot dry desert down there. And the biggest issues we are facing down in Southern California, okay, are urban interface issues. Besides the resources, the lack of water, we have a real problem in some of our areas with degraded springs and springs not producing due to extended drought periods.

But you can see in these photos, our biggest issue is the urban interface. We've got burros on the sides of roads which create a public safety hazard for the people traveling and for the animals. And then the top right picture is actually on a military installation where the animals actually go and shade up, trying to get out of the hot desert heat. And another big issue is in the lower right picture. We've got animals that come into recreational areas along the Colorado River.

Those add up to keep us busy in Southern California, and we have people spread out all over Southern California to try and address these issues because none of these animals are close by. It's a 4-hour or 5-hour drive from our Ridgecrest facility down to some of these areas. That's why it was mentioned, the collateral duty people. We have some folks now who will be able to assist us when dealing with some of these more remote issues. And I say remote, I mean remote from Ridgecrest which is where our Southern California wild horse and burro program has been based historically.

OK. this is a bunch of numbers. It is all our HMAs, their AML and our population estimates. The ones that are red are over AML, so we are a bit over AML with the horses, and we are very over AML with the burros. Chocolate Mule Mountain is our highest over AML. Chad, wherever you are out there, you'll be hearing from us about Chocolate Mule Mountain, getting that on the schedule.

And Chemehuevi is another big burro issue. The problem with gathering Chemehuevi is it is in the middle of town. There's a lot of people, so it's hard to do a helicopter gather, for example, over a large area and where most of the burros are congregated in town. That brings up a lot of issues with private property, private property access, and again that burro-urban interface. Okay, next.

In California, we have 2 holding facilities, and apparently some technical difficulty right now.

Yeah. There it is. Okay. We have 2 holding facilities in California. This one's Litchfield. It's up outside of Susanville. It has a 1,000-head capacity, both of ours do, and right now it is at capacity. This is a satellite photo. It is a very large facility. Each one of those areas that you can kind of see delineated, there are at least 5 acres, so we are talking about a very large facility. And we've got a staff of 5 running that facility right now. And as Liz mentioned, we have lots of animals for adoption there. So, next.

This is our Ridgecrest facility down south. We're not as full there, but we are still pretty full. We have mostly burros down there, and it is associated with our Ridgecrest field office. It is a prep and holding facility, and soon to be, we will have a full staff there. We've had some staffing issues. We're without a facility manager, which makes things a little difficult, but kudos to the staff for doing what they can with what they've got right now to get animals into good homes. So, next.

This is the Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center. They are a partner of ours. We've been in an assistance agreement with them since 2013. They are based just south of Sacramento, here in the Central Valley, which is very convenient to the 2

major north-south throughways in California. Since the inception of the program, they've adopted 185 animals to various entities, both private and public entities. It's thriving and [has] been a really nice partnership.

I'll tell you a little bit more about it. We adopt, as I mentioned, not only to private adopters, but also quite a bit to other agencies. We've got Anaheim Police Department in the lower right. Yosemite has adopted from us. The first adopter is in the lower right-hand corner. I said lower left. I meant lower left before, lower right. She was our first horse adopted, and that went to our Sacramento Police Department, Sacramento City, and in border patrol, as well.

And BLM finally jumped on the bandwagon, and we now have BLM officers who are patrolling on horses that were trained out of R3C. So, late to adopt, but we are now high and mighty on our horses. They've been getting a ton of positive feedback. The supervisor actually called me and is like, "This is the best thing." He was reluctant to do it, and he's so glad he did because now there's such a positive interaction because of the horses.

Our officers are more approachable because everybody wants to pet the horses. They've had a lot of positive interactions as well as it provides a stealthy way to patrol, so they can go out in plain clothes and not be heard, as an ATV, for example, and have found some pretty buried marijuana grows, for example, because people just think they're out riding, and they don't realize that it's law enforcement on horseback. So, that's kind of cool.

And then we do our little jokes sometimes. We have our repeat offenders. We've been in business with the Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center since 2013, and we have numerous people who have come back and adopted again. So, we joke with the repeat offenders. But yeah, these horses, their training program is highly valued in the local community, so we've been really excited about that. Some of these people have adopted 4 and 5 horses from the program, so that's really nice. We've had 10 people in total since this inception of the program coming back.

We also work with adoption partners throughout the state, notably the Back Country Horsemen's Association. They have a rendezvous. That's their annual meeting, and we are at that meeting every year offering horses and burros for adoptions. Next.

And then the other thing that we do is compliance checks. That, really, our compliance checks, we have to do them by policy, but what it also does is it gives the BLM an opportunity to have a public interaction with the BLM, and oftentimes a positive interaction. Not all of our compliance issues are negative. Actually, most of them are very positive, such as little Willow here. You can see [they] are all decked out.

And, no, she's just laying down with her adopter. She does this. Her mother was so excited that they do... They did this almost daily in the summer. When her adopter was out there playing with her, they would lay down and take naps. So, nothing is wrong with that horse. Our management ends up hearing about the negative ones because that's when management gets involved. But most of our adopters are very good adopters and very happy to have the horses or burros in their families, so that's really nice.

We do a lot of education and outreach. California is a huge horse economy, and we'd like to get a bigger share of it. With COVID, we got waylaid like everybody did, and now we're ramping back up to demonstrate and promote the value of these horses and burros, whether it's finding new markets such as the pack burro racing, which you see there on the lower right, doing therapy work, like you see on the lower left. But a lot of people are using these horses for various and sundry things, like trail riding, or competitive endurance racing, and things like that. We've also have a long list of law enforcement agencies who are looking to adopt horses.

One other way we do outreach for education is going to schools, school visits. We get lots of requests to take our animals to school. That's kind of fun. I mean, I really enjoy that. Just for fun, the one in the lower left is a strange picture, but that's a juvenile detention center. That's what they call a no-climb fence. It means something different in the horse world, but in the law enforcement or the correctional facilities world, that's what that is. And those kids had a fabulous time interacting with the animals.

And then we also work with other partners. For example, every year, the University of California at Davis puts on the Donkey Welfare Symposium, which is an international symposium dealing with donkey welfare issues, and healthcare, and things like that, management, behavior. It's a very large international event, and we have been part of it almost since the beginning. We've done adoptions with them. We provided animals to train the veterinary students how to handle and train burros and increase or improve their veterinary training experience.

We also do the Western States Horse Expo, which is a very large expo here in Sacramento. We've been doing that since the inception of the expo, so we are one of their longest running partners where we demonstrate and promote the adoption of these animals. We have ambassadors who bring their animals and show off their animals and show what the horses can be like once they're trained, and burros too. I don't ever want to forget the burros. We do that every year, and last year we used the Mustang Champions virtual reality goggles, and that was lots of fun.

We can't do any of these things without our volunteers, and we have community events. We are located in limited number of offices, and we rely a lot on our volunteers who live throughout the state to tell us about events that are happening in their neighborhoods where we can come and promote the program. So, I never ever want to underestimate the value of our volunteers because California is a very large state, and we are only in a few offices. And where the horses are located or not where the people are located, so we really use and heavily rely on our volunteers to help us find new markets and outlets in places.

I know we have a very packed schedule today, but if anybody has questions, do I take those now?

Ms. Dumas: Okay. Or if not, I'll be around. Commissioner French.

Ms. Carlisle: Commissioner French.

Commissioner French: Yes, I had a quick question. I'm not sure you'd be able to answer at this stage, but I wanted to get it out on the table right now, so we can talk about it. You mentioned earlier that some of the HMAs that you are currently managing on the north end of the state you hold in common with the northwestern Nevada.

Ms. Dumas: Yes.

Commissioner French: As you're well aware, there are some significant issues surrounding public lands management protocols having to do with sage-grouse management.

Ms. Dumas: Mm-hmm.

Commissioner French: It turns out that that portion that you're looking at right now, northwestern Nevada, is what we refer to as the holy land with regard to sage-grouse critical habitat.

Ms. Dumas: Right.

Commissioner French: I'm wondering... I was looking really quickly at your list of HMAs, and it looked to me like about 30% of them you're actually meeting AML. My question is, and I just get it out, you may or may not be able to answer this at this point, but I'm wondering what plan B looks like. If we are actually making significant changes on public land use, whether it be recreational access or grazing or mining or lots of other uses out on the ground that have to do with preserving sage-grouse critical habitat, what does plan B look like for those HMAs that are impacting critical habitat for sage-grouse?

Ms. Dumas: The quick answer that I have for that, and again, probably need to delay and get some more information for you to answer that in whole, but I know that where the sage-grouse focal areas where we had 3 HMAs that were part of

that, and they are pretty close. They have been gathered within the past 2 and 3 years. Their numbers have come down, as far as the horse populations go, in those HMAs that have the sage-grouse habitat in them.

We have been considering sage-grouse as part of our prioritization of which HMAs we put forth to be gathered on our gather schedule, when we do our gather schedule planning. I don't know if I'm quite answering your question, but-

Commissioner French: Well, actually...

Ms. Dumas: ... we have considered that. I mean, that is part of the consideration in determining priorities. It is a-

Commissioner French: So, it is bumping those gathers up relative to protocol. Is that-

Ms. Dumas: Yeah. I mean, when we prioritize our gathers... or the HMAs, I should say. When we prioritize the HMAs that we submit for consideration to be put on the gather schedule by headquarters, we consider the, "Hey, this one's got these T&E [threatened and endangered]," for example, whether it's sage-grouse or any other threatened and endangered, T&E, threatened and endangered species on it. That is part of our prioritization process.

Commissioner French: Okay. And one last real quick question I would like to get out on the table right now. I think we would all would agree that AML was established in about 1971-72 in many of these HMAs. I think we'd all agree that the public land has probably been impacted by wildfire significantly since 1972 in most of these HMAs, at least in northern Nevada, for certain.

I'm wondering where the BLMs falls on with regard to assessing AML at this stage because, as you're well aware, many of these HMAs, following a fire event, there is usually some pretty significant changes in vegetative types, certainly in productivity and having to do with type conversion. Certainly, goes from sagebrush steppe to a, many cases, cheatgrass-

Ms. Dumas: Cheatgrass, yeah.

Commissioner French: I'm wondering what is the protocol within the bureau to actually reassess that? Because obviously, if we're setting AML based on data that's 50 years old, how are we meeting those needs of those changes that are occurring on those HMAs?

Ms. Dumas: I probably can't speak for the entire BLM, but there's a few things. I know that many AMLs have been reevaluated since the passage of the act, but that does not mean that we should not be... I mean, many of the AMLs were not set in 1971 that we're currently using. They've been updated since 1971. But not withstanding that, we should be looking at those AMLs given the change of over time.

That is prioritized by our managers at the district level about based on what funding they get from the programs as well as their other needs that they have to address within their districts. BLM's multiple-use mission, this is not the only program that people have to consider in their management decisions. We encourage, in our workforce plan... well, I guess not our workforce planning, but our work planning, workload planning, that, yeah, you might want to put this on your list of things to do.

But from where I sit, all I can do is lobby for it, if you will, with the management. I don't have that authority to say, "This is what we're doing." But I hear your comment, and I agree, and I understand where you're coming from. I just am not the right person to make that decision.

Commissioner French: Right.

Mr. McGuire: Good.

Commissioner French: Well, I didn't mean to put you on the spot.

Ms. Dumas: No, that's fine.

Commissioner French: I wanted to get this issue out on the table for us to discuss because I think it is a major concern coming down the road.

Ms. Dumas: Yeah.

Commissioner French: So, thanks.

Mr. McGuire: Commissioner French, if I can just add to what Amy said. I think she answered the question very well. The fact is, over the course of the last almost 55 years, AMLs have been revised in different places, so that's a process that does occur. And I will tell you that within the program and the agency, there's a recognition of what you just highlighted, which is, over the last 55 years, obviously ecological conditions have evolved across the range, and that there needs to be an emphasis or a focus on looking at where updates to AML are warranted. It's a fact that we're not unaware of, and I think we can continue to have conversations. I appreciate you bringing it up here. I think it's entirely appropriate for the Board to be focused on that as well and to advise the agency on that very issue.

Commissioner French: Great, thanks. Real quick, Paul, is there a policy in play right now that following coming out of a post-fire reclamation process coming out of a fire, is there a policy in place that would allow for the Bureau to actually reevaluate an allotment or an HMA coming out of a fire immediately or that it's just something we just look at down the road as we go?

I know we do almost like the Bear teams used to be. We actually go through and evaluate the burn spot and what the changes to that piece of real estate are going to be, and trying to make changes to other uses, whether it be livestock grazing or other uses on that to try to protect that piece of ground during that reclamation period. Do we have that same kind of protocols in place for an HMA when one is involved with a major fire event like that?

Mr. McGuire: I'm not aware of a policy specific to what you're asking. And certainly, if Chad Hunter has any insights that he can add, I would welcome him to step up. You're probably aware that AMLs are set through the RMP process, the resource management process, which is something that is typically on like a 20-year cycle. It's not necessarily triggered by a salient event. It's something that is scheduled and planned and done.

So, to answer your specific question, I don't believe there's a policy that directs, or I would say that directs the agency to update AML in the event of a catastrophic event, like a fire. Certainly, there would be mitigation actions that would occur after such an event, which might include, and has included, removing horses from an area for extended period of time so that the area can recover before those horses are reintroduced, but the actual act of updating the appropriate management level would be one done through the resource management process.

Commissioner French: Thanks.

Ms. Carlisle: I have a question about... You were talking about how, in California, you are pretty volunteer heavy, which is exciting because a lot of people try to look for ways to be involved. How are you all administrating that? Because it's a lot of work to manage volunteers.

Ms. Dumas: Yes, it is. Fortunately, we've got some of those... those volunteer administrative processes were my responsibility, but now we have some other additional people, who, actually, our compliance folks will be having some responsibilities for working with the volunteers too. Which is very helpful because we have 2 compliance people in a big state, and having those volunteers to help them is really nice.

But a lot of people, and we've been engaging our field offices because we've got a bunch of new field managers. And trying to enlighten them on what their roles are within the horse program, even if they don't have a herd management area in their field office, that we need their assistance in setting up or finding new adoption markets and locations. And that they may have adopters or volunteers in their area, and they can work with them to help us find the animals good home and do promotion and outreach in new areas and stuff.

We have some collateral duty people who are helping us manage the volunteers. And again, COVID, I hate to keep throwing that out, but it really did hamper a lot of our activities, and so now we're reinvigorating the program.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Thank you very much. Can you speak a little bit more about what the prioritization process includes that you use to determine which HMAs to manage in particular ways?

Ms. Dumas: Well, when I was talking about the prioritization before, I was referring to which HMAs we were suggesting need to be gathered, not our general management of the HMAs. So, to address the gather requesting process, we'll look for T&E species. We'll look for numbers. We'll look for... Come on, word come out of my head. We'll look for resource issues, and we'll prioritize them that way. So, we'll look for ones that may have had some emergency, for example, lack of water or a lot of public safety issues. That will bump up over one that just might be over numbers, for example.

We're trying to do what we can that's going to be best for the animals in their habitat, and also the public. We have to address the public issues. So those are things that we really focus on when we're trying to say, "Hey, these are the areas we want gathered."

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: I was thinking about it in response to what Commissioner French and Paul were just talking about because, in many cases, when the range has had a lot of impact, so it's transitioned to invasive species, or it's transitioned away from the intact native conditions, it seems like those places might be even a lower priority for removing horses than places that are in a better ecological condition. But if the horse trajectory is going in a way where it's going to have increased impacts, you would want to reduce the ecological impacts by removing the horses. Is that considered in it, the condition of the expected ecological impacts of what the population is doing?

Ms. Dumas: Yeah, I mean that's part of everything that we consider. It's a balancing act. I feel like we're trying to do this pick and choose with one hand tied behind our back and hogtied on the ground. So, we're doing our best to do what's going to be the most effective management for the habitat because, you know, without the habitat, we can't have the populations.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Yep.

Ms. Dumas: But we also have to address the animal condition first. If the animals are suffering, the habitats are already way beyond suffering. It's a balancing act. Sometimes it is just looking at that table of our population numbers and like, "Oh, my gosh, this one is way over. We really need to address this." We haven't heard much about it because we don't hear as much about the southern burros, as much, because they're more remote. Which is awkward because they also have the most urban interface because the burros congregate where there's water, and where there's water, there's people. Anyway, but yeah, it's a balancing act. We have to take into consideration a lot of those facets when putting our lists together.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Do you have a formal process that you use, or it's more discussion among the teams?

Ms. Dumas: Well, there's discussion amongst the team. We get feedback from the field, but we do, we have policies that help us guide what is the priority. How are we supposed to prioritize? It starts with emergencies and those higher urgency. And then we also have to consider other things, like funding.

At the state level, we don't control the gather schedule. The headquarters does. We are just submitting what we hope to get, and then it's out of our hands until we're approved or not.

But yeah, we want to get in front of things. We don't want to be allowing conditions to degrade, but we're just doing what we can with what we've got, basically.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Right, exactly, yeah.

Ms. Dumas: And it's limited by how many spaces at the end are there. So, it's really important for us, especially in... well, I guess everywhere in the program, but I can only speak for California, to get animals into good homes. Because every animal that we find a home for means that's another animal that can come off the range, to protect the range so that the rest of the animals have a place to stay for all eternity.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: I mean, based on your presentation, it seems like there's like 200 slots open right now in your facilities.

Ms. Dumas: And that's today. I mean, they could've shipped out 20 loads yesterday. I don't know. We can ask people about that who know that more than I do. But yeah, I mean... that is a snapshot in time. It just is to let you know that we have these facilities, they have the capacity, and we're using the capacity. And we're doing our darndest to reduce the inventory by providing some really nice animals for people to adopt. So, thank you.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Sure.

Ms. Dumas: Dr. Perryman and then Dr. King.

Mr. Kuechle: And Miss McAlpine has a question online. And then we should probably maybe round this out.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Okay, I'll make it as brief as possible. I won't demand an answer at this point in time. But there were about 17 or 18 things on the list that are used to determine priorities for gathers. It's a pretty long list of things. But directly to my question is it's become obvious to most of us that have been around this challenge for a number of years that the Bureau, for whatever reasons, spend most of their resources, both human capital and actual capital, in managing production of horses. We manage production when the problem is reproduction. The problem is not production. The problem is reproduction, but most of the assets go toward managing production.

So, my question to you and to each state director and each horse lead in each state and to the national leadership team in Washington, D.C., and those that are here is, if we woke up next Monday morning... What is today? Tuesday?

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Okay, we'll give it 7 days. If we woke up next Tuesday morning at AML, across the Board, what are the first 2 things that the Bureau would do? And we've been talking about this, and I've been talking about it for years. Once you get to AML, lots of management tools become useful that weren't and that aren't very useful at managing production. They suddenly become useful.

So, what we've been doing and what we're still continuing to do is it's like debt service. We're paying the interest, and we never get to a point where we're addressing where we're trying to pay down the debt. So, what are we going to do? Just go on forever and do this?

Let's just play a game. Next Tuesday morning, if we woke up and we were at AML, and suddenly it was like, "Oh, we're at AML," something happened during the night, what are the first 2 things that the Bureau would do? And I'm not sure that there's a consensus of answers there, but it's a thought experiment to think about.

Like I said, I don't want to demand an answer right now. We need to move on, so I'll just leave it. But I think that's an exercise, and the Board's going to talk about this over the next couple of days. This is an exercise that needs to be done, in my opinion anyway. And it's because we got to start getting to the problem. The problem is not production. The problem is reproduction.

When I see 1500 doses of contraception in the plan, when every group that is interested, almost every group I guess I could say, that's interested in this problem joins together around this concept of contraception, we're still not getting it. We're still not getting the message and we're not really addressing the problem. But again, the problem is reproduction, it's not production. Now I'm not minimizing the need for managing production because we have critical wildlife habitat out there that's just screaming for some relief. And so, it's important to manage production. But I think, and we're going to discuss this, there probably should be a little bit more balance on the production reproduction side, so I yield back. Thank you.

Dr. King, Ph. D.: I have a somewhat simpler question. I'm really curious about mules. How many mules are there, and do you see more mules every year or is it just like they're just occasional occurrences of mules?

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: And hinnies also.

Dr. King, Ph. D.: And hinnies, yeah. Do you have both?

Ms. Dumas: Yes, we do have both. I don't know the number off the top of my head of how many we have. I do know that the number has been going up, looking at the flight survey data, and actually our last Twin Peaks gather, they actually turned the adult mule back. In 2010, they did not necessarily, they removed things that were four and under. But after some cajoling we moved ones that were still un-weaned. The number of mules out there does seem to be getting a little larger.

We definitely have some hinnies, although without seeing something on the side, there's really no proof if it's a hinnie or a mule. But there's some funny looking mules out there so we're guessing they're hinnies. When we brought in animals, we've seen burros come in with horses and we've seen horses come in with burros, so we'd like to turn those back. The jack comes in with a bunch of horses, turn him back, he likes his girls tall. And vice versa, if we've got a stud that comes in with some jennies... We don't see that nearly as often as the other way around. But yeah, we try to make sure those go back out, make more mules.

Dr. King, Ph.D.: Thank you. Yeah, it's fascinating to me.

Ms. Dumas: They're really neat too.

Ms. Carlisle: Miss McAlpine.

Ms. McAlpine: Thank you. You brought up a question that I'd like you just to finish the answer, why you turn these jacks back out. Just for the public. I have my assumption.

Ms. Dumas: Oh, okay. Well, the way they make mules. Mules are, in essence, natural population control. They're sterile, they don't reproduce. And so, the jack mules, as far as I've been aware, act like stallions. They keep a band of horses, they keep a band of mares, and they protect them from getting pregnant, so the more mules we have out there, they help slow population growth. Now, I am talking from what people have told me. I don't have data or statistics, that's just what I've been told over the years and seems to make sense and we've seen it anecdotally.

Ms. McAlpine: Good, thank you. And then my actual crest question is, and it's not necessarily directed to you, it's more in the line of what Barry was talking about. What are the future plans regarding this increased urbanization that we're having

and any negative impact on adoption policies, considering that we have a huge excess of population increases in both horses and burros? We're seeing more interfacing in a negative way between these wild horses and particularly the burros and considering the increasing costs we're having for maintaining unadoptable animals.

Ms. Dumas: I'm going to turn that one over to Paul. That's beyond my universe.

Ms. McAlpine: Expertise. Yep, thank you.

Mr. McGuire: Thank you. I might ask you to help clarify that question for me, but I would like to kind of bounce back to what Dr. Perryman's thought experiment earlier. If next week we discovered that we were at AML across the Board, it would be important to acknowledge that that would not have occurred in a vacuum. And it would've come about as a result of massive removals of animals. And so, whereas we have approximately 60,000 animals in off range holding at present, if we could suddenly arrive at AML, that would be the result of removing another 50,000 animals at least, which would add to that off range holding conundrum and the associated cost with maintaining that. And to your question, what would we do if we found ourselves in that situation?

Well, the first thing we would do is commit ourselves to caring for the now 110-120,000 animals we have at off range holding. That of course would require a concurrent commitment by Congress to fund the program to sustain that. I think the second thing that we would do is something that we've spoken with this Board at length about, would be to begin employing fertility control in the way that it can be most effective, which is as a maintenance tool. There's a broad misconception that fertility control is a tool for population reduction when in fact it's a tool for population maintenance. If we could magically get to AML overnight or over the next 7 days, then that would put us in a position where we could really begin employing fertility control in the way that it could be used most effectively. Those are probably the 2 things I would say to answer that thought experiment that you presented. Ms. McAlpine, do you mind restating your question again and I'll try my best to respond to that?

Ms. McAlpine: Yep. It kind of goes along with what Barry had mentioned. Make it really easy, more urbanization makes less rural space. Less rural space equals less adoption opportunities. Less adoptions equal more holding, and that requires, again, more space and significantly more money. The base of my question isn't simply reducing to AML, and I'm going to say we, because the Board is part of this whole process, when are we going to get serious about fertility control for both sexes?

Mr. McGuire: Okay. I think you hit on a point that is very valid, which is that as we move forward in time, the potential horse-adopting public is not a growing segment of the population. And so, the long-term prospect for adoption as an avenue for reducing the off-range holding burden, I would argue is not strong. We're not creating more land; we're not creating more rural space. I think the long-term trend is highly constrained in terms of the number of animals that can conceivably be adopted. Since private placement is the primary means we have of alleviating the off-range holding burden, it points to issues surrounding policies that constrain the agency and the program's ability to fully exercise the authorities in the act. I won't go into further detail about that because that's not on the table at present, but that is part of the future scenario.

I think your other question was about when we would get serious about using fertility control, and I would loop back, it is a conundrum because fertility control application is most effective in herds that are at or near AML, and so you have to arrive at that place before that can become a truly effective tool. How do you do that if your ability to place animals into private care through adoption are limited and therefore your ability to continue removing animals to actually arrive at AML is therefore limited? It's a twisted knot. I don't know that any of us this week will find the silver bullet, we've been searching for it for 55 years. But we do know that we have to employ the resources that are made available to the program to the greatest effect that we can within the authorities and policy constraints that we operate under.

Another part of your question, concerning getting serious about fertility control for both males and females, and that's a question that's been asked many times by many people. I think most folks here would understand that fertility control for

males has severe limitations in terms of its effectiveness to actually control population growth on the range. You would have to have extraordinarily high success rate in gathering and successfully gelding males on the range to actually realize long-term reductions in population. There are people in this room much smarter on that issue than I am, but that's kind of the thumbnail of why fertility control focused on males has not been a major emphasis for the program. Certainly, of course, animals that are removed from the range, all males are gelded by policy, and that's so that we're not continuing the reproduction issue that Dr. Perryman discussed in our off-range holding facilities since that would exacerbate the issue we have there at present. I don't know if that answers your question, but I'm happy to try and fill in any gaps.

Ms. Carlisle: I'm going to jump in here. In the interest of time, I think we need to move on to our next presentation. This is one of the favorite topics of the Board, so this will not be the end of this discussion, but I believe only the beginning and probably what will take up the majority of our discussion time tomorrow. Let's go ahead and Bryant take it away.

Mr. Kuechle: Thank you and thank you Amy. We're going to go ahead and introduce Charlie Johnston and Madeline Levy. They're with Forest Service Region 5 Wild Horse and Burro Program. They're going to provide an update from the Forest Service on the work that they're doing here in California.

U.S Forest Service Region 5, Welcome and Updates

Charlie Johnston and Madeline Levy, Wild Horse and Burro Program, U.S Forest Service Region 5

Ms. Johnston: Good morning and welcome to the Forest Service Pacific Southwest region, also known as Region 5 for the U.S Forest Service. My name is Charlie Johnston. I work within the U.S Forest Service Region 5, but I'm stationed on the Modoc National Forest as the facility manager at Double Devil Wild Horse Corrals. As we go through our presentation today, we want you to keep in mind that the work that we're talking about is largely done not only with partnerships but with 7, and I'll say it again, 7 U.S Forest Service employees. We like to say we're small, but we're mighty and we certainly rely very heavily on our partners. Thank you to the Board for your support and for your diverse opinions and approach to wild horse management. With that, I'm going to turn it over to Madeline.

Ms. Levy: Thank you, Charlie. My name is Madeline Levy. I am the Wild Horse Specialist for the Devil's Garden Wild Horse Territory. Today I'll be going through slides and introducing some of our wild horse territories throughout the region. In Region 5, have 9 total wild horse and Burro territories. In the state of California. We have the Inyo National Forest with 3 wild horse territories, the Klamath National Forest with 2, the Lassen National Forest with one, the Los Padres National Forest with one, and the Modoc National Forest with one. Of those 9 wild horse territories, 8 are active. Of those 8 actives, 3 are being actively managed, those in which we'll discuss today. The first one on our list is McGavin Peak. McGavin Peak Wild Horse Territory is about 7 miles east of a very small town called Doris, California on the Klamath National Forest. That's going to be about 3 hours north of Reading. The appropriate management level is zero, although it is still an active territory.

The territory consists of 16,045 acres, about 4,000 of those being Forest Service, about 2000 BLM, and about 10,000 of private land, currently, one of the bigger issues you're seeing on McGavin Peak is the management complications between private landowners and gathering horses, so horses on private land. A territory update from McGavin Peak is the Forest Service personnel are actively bait trapping that territory. Then we have the Devil's Garden, which is where we are from. The Devil's Garden Wild Horse Territory is about 7 miles north of Alturas, California. That is going to be on the Modoc National Forest about 3 hours north of Reno. The designated AML is between 206 and 402 wild horses. Our recent aerial surveys that were conducted last spring showed an approximation between 651 and 998 wild horses roaming on the territory. The designated territory is about 258,000 acres with a small percentage being the BLM, tribal lands, and private. One of the bigger issues we face on the Devil's Garden Plateau is going to be resource degradation.

Current research and partnership projects that we have conducted with the Devil's Garden Wild Horse Territories are going to be about 2 projects. Our first one is going to be with APHIS Wildlife Services, and that's going to be a Gonacon study looking at hormone responses to Gonacon. Our second one is going to be a study we are doing with USGS out of Fort Collins, and that's a demography study that we're doing with wild horses and their response to predation, that's going to include a series of about 55 plus cameras on a gridded system across the entire territory, plus collared horses roaming

the territory, and that's going to help us further understand the herd, herd dynamics and improving aerial survey results. A territory update from the Devil's Garden is we are currently in the middle of our fiscal year 24 gather. We have gathered 341 horses during the entire month of November, and that looked like both bait trapping and helicopter trapping.

We took a slight pause during the holidays, and we'll be back gathering in a few weeks, both bait trapping and helicopter gathering. Additionally, we are wrapping up our final edits of our updated territory management plan. Hopefully we will be coming to a decision in the next few months. Our next territory is going to be Montgomery Pass. Montgomery Pass Wild Horse Territory is located east of Mono Lake, which is about 40 miles east of Bishop. Their appropriate management level is between 138 and 230 horses. Their recent aerial survey results were 699 horses. One of their bigger issues that you will find on the Inyo is that urban interface and personal safety due to highway accidents. The territory consists of approximately 200,000 acres of California and Nevada land with 65,942 acres on the international forest. Their territory update is they are also in the final stages of an updated Montgomery Pass EA [Environmental Assessment], which is just specific to gathering horses outside of the designated territory. With that I will pass it to Charlie.

Ms. Johnston: Today we will speak about Double Devil Wild Horse Crows, which is one of 2 Forest Service Crows in the nation. We are located in Alturas, California, right along the Devil's Garden Plateau. Our current holding capacity is 750 animals. We are not near capacity at this time. However, to the next bullet point, we have accepted and are accepting and placing horses and burros from Forest Service Regions 3, which is Arizona, New Mexico, 4, which is Utah, and Nevada Region 5 and Region 6. Of Region 4, we received approximately 70 horses from an emergency gather out of North Hills. Those horses were in pretty poor condition and so we are trying to get them to a healthy body condition and that was not a fun thing to see is the horses coming off the range looking in such poor condition. But we're getting them back where they need to be. We have just received notice that we will start receiving shipments of horses for Murders Creek, which is Region 6, also an emergency gather.

In addition to those mentioned above, we've accepted and placed 178 Forest Service horses, which were previously in BLM holding facilities as per our agreement, so hopefully that alleviates just a small portion of the holding capacity that they see, and we want to give a special shout out to Paul and Meredith for making that happen. On average between 2018, which was when the corrals were built to present, we placed 30 horses a month and we've maintained a 99% placement rate. The highlights that we'll go over today is what helps us continue to be successful and allow us to continue to accept horses, not only from Devil's Garden, but off of other ranges out of other regions, specifically the emergency gathers where those animals need to be removed.

The highlights that we'll talk about today are youth engagements, partners, working stock, The Greatest Good, which you may be familiar with from Gifford Pinchot who was part of the Forest Service, and our continued success. Again, this is specific to our program on the Modoc National Forest. Throughout the last calendar year youth engagements, we've placed 65 horses into 3 different youth challenges. Youth challenges and youth engagement in particular are very near and dear to our heart. I think we can all acknowledge that as an equine industry, youth engagement is dwindling and we want to keep those kiddos engaged as much as possible, and if we can be a part of that, that's important to us. We've participated in 2 education events and also hosted 2 seniors for an internship who plan to go into veterinary medicine in their continuing education. We do see the need for veterinarians across the board to have that exposure to wild horse and burros, and so we're happy to be a part of that.

Through our partnership with the Mustang Heritage Foundation, we have placed over 230 horses in the last 11 months. We have provided 15 horses to 2 federal agencies into their working stock programs. That is 8 horses to the United States Border Patrol, that is 5 horses into the Forest Service mounted patrol units of law enforcement investigations, and we also have some in-range programs, including right on the Modoc National Forest. We've hosted 6 adoption events, 5 off-site with partners. The Greatest Good, we heard of a little foal that was rejected and orphaned in the Reno area and donated 10 buckets of full replacers to Wild Horse Connection and we drove those from Alturas to Reno because we had them on hand and there was a shortage at the time.

Through the great help of Chair Carlisle, we were put into connection with an outstanding research group and a preserve and have moved forward in providing 24 horses to contribute to fertility control advances. We're excited to see the

outcome of that research and we're so thankful for that connection. The Greatest Good, we have provided 10 horses and 2 4 accredited programs that are equine assisted therapy programs that largely focus on veterans' therapy, first responder therapy, which is near and dear to our heart as we recently lost one of our law enforcement officers. Also too, mental health practitioners. We often see that they're the ones that help, but they don't get the help and so we're really excited to be able to see the equine assisted therapy help them.

Going on to continued success, we've had the opportunity to build 4 new holding pens. We've added some 3-sided shelters and some windbreaks at the Crouse and 2 of the new holding pens are designed to be of a natural setting mimicking the territory at large. Continued success, one of the things that we're very proud of is we have worked with our partners at Gentle Hearts Stables in Pennsylvania and launched a satellite adoption center where we can provide gentled and un-gentled horses to the East Coast because that is a market area that is important for us to continue to put horses into, we have really great adopters out there, and to further demonstrate that the older horses are trainable. There's a large stigma that older horses are untrainable, they're set in their ways, they've been in the wild too long, and through Gentle Hearts Stables, we've been able to showcase that that's not always the case.

This is just a photo collage of the things that I just discussed showing what we've done. Our crew built the new corrals, the new holding pens in facility, which was an 80% cost decrease that if we were to go out and purchase pre-made panels, by doing it in-house with our own staff and materials purchased. You can see part of our partnership with the Mustang Heritage Foundation, we all traveled out to Tennessee. Our youth engagement events, our horse right there in the middle, Duke, who is now part of the Modoc National Forest Range program, he's a Devil's Garden horse. He's actually 12 years old, so again, demonstrating that the older horses do have the trainability just as one is younger. And then some humane care and welfare things. Installing 3-sided shelters, because we do live in pretty harsh conditions. We were able to get some free road brushes that the horses can rub on and also wind breaks that we installed. With that, that ends our presentation for the Pacific Southwest Region 5 and the Modoc National Forest. We'd like to open it up to questions.

Discussion

Ms. Carlisle: I know this Board doesn't not have questions, but I'll kick it off. I've been to that facility, and it is remarkable that your team is so small and accomplishes so much. Just talking with you all as individuals and watching your interactions with not only the horses that are there, but also your staff, everyone is a thousand percent pro horse and animal welfare. I just want to say it's really obvious when you actually get down on the dirt with you guys that your thought process is putting those animals first but trying to figure that all out within some pretty serious constraints. You all are excellent models for thinking outside the box for sure. Those carpet things for the horses are pretty good. The GonaCon study that's happening on site, which I saw a little bit of, can you go into how things like that get set up and then how you all interface with that because it is important that this work is happening on the ground with the people that actually might eventually be the users or the folks that need to implement that sort of thing.

Ms. Levy: Thank you, Celeste. These types of research opportunities or projects get presented to us by those partners, and it takes a bit of legwork in the beginning. I had the USGS [United States Geological Survey] reach out or USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] Wildlife Services. Either us folks on the ground might reach out to said partners saying, "Hey, these are some issues that we might come and face within a few years once and if we reach AML." Trying to kind of plan for the future, so reaching out. Or vice versa, a researcher approaching us saying, "Hey, you all might have the opportunity in the future to use these tools. How do you feel about diving deeper into it and studying them or using said horses?" It all begins with a conversation that then goes through all the processes and eventually hopefully can turn into something beautiful and like a 2 plus year research project that again, we hope will add tools to the toolbox, not only locally, but then potentially on a national scale when and if AML is reached. Hopefully that answered your question.

Commissioner French: Real quick question. I was curious when you were talking about developing your territory management plans that were pre-decisional, I was wondering who's at the table when you are developing those pre-decisional management goals in a plan like that?

Ms. Levy: The way how this works in the Forest Service is it's going through an EA NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act] process, and that's going to go through public scoping in the very, very beginning of this project. That was about 3 years ago now. We write those alternatives, release it to the public, and we take those public scoping comments back, and that's how then we integrate it into the project.

Commissioner French: Pre-decisionally, I get the whole scoping side of it. Once you've got it down to a range of alternatives that come from that, how do you develop the final pre-decisional set of goals that you elevate up there for a decision?

Ms. Levy: Very similar. Once that public scoping is complete, we did about 2 and a half years of writing that EA, and then that goes out to those objectors who then come back with objections, and we use that feedback to develop those decisions.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: With any of those decisions also, there are other agencies, wildlife services, and we have biologists and everything that weigh in on all of that stuff, so that becomes very important.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Can you speak a little bit more about your strategies for getting horses to the East Coast? Because it seems like a lot of your horses do go out there.

Ms. Johnston: Absolutely. As I think our partners in the BLM have mentioned this morning is the market areas can be somewhat challenging to break into, and thankfully for us, starting out offering the Devil's Garden Horses really opened up that opportunity for us because they are known, much like the Twin Peaks horses, to have great size, great minds, trainability, they're very stocky. And so that opened the door for us. But it's continuing to work with partners and build the ne2rks and have funding available to make our marketing strategies actually happen.

And so, we have heard from our adopters, sorry, time and time again, they want more horses on the East Coast. A lot of them feel like they are only offered the leftover horses, and that's not what we want. We want to offer them just like somebody that lived in our own community. We want them to have an opportunity at the same horses. I don't think you could go wrong with any of the horses. Again, I think I told you guys last time, I won't tell you how many I've adopted. I did add 2 BLM burros recently. I'm over the moon. But tapping into that market has been integral to our adoption and placement and success, and it only continues to grow.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Thank you.

Dr. King, Ph.D.: I have a question about the trainability of older horses. In what framework, how are you assessing that or looking at that?

Ms. Johnston: Sure. There is a stigma that an older horse who's been out on the range longer is set in their ways, especially one that might have been a stallion and is now a gelding, and they're just stubborn. Much like there's a stigma that wild horses are thought to be crazy by some, which I wholeheartedly don't agree with. Love them. But we have put into challenges older horses, meaning horses that are 8 years old and older and said, "Okay, here's the timeline that you have to train these horses. Let's see if we can do it in a humane way."

We have seen the older horses, again, being 8 and older, do the things just as well in as just great of a timeline as the horses that are younger. I removed the pictures from the slide, and I wished I hadn't now, but there was a slide where there was a 23-year-old horse, a 16-year-old horse, and a 10-year-old horse, 10 days out of our holding facility, and the trainers were hands-on with them, and this was voluntary from the horses. They were approaching the humans through that training. A lot of it was through veterans' programs as well, and it's just that human connection. That's just, again, one of the things that we want to push aside is that there are value in the older horses just as there are value in the younger horses, just as there are value in the burros, and don't push them aside because of the age alone.

Ms. Carlisle: Anybody online with any questions or comments for Forest Service at this point?

Ms. Carlisle: No.

Mr. Kuechle: Nope.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay.

Mr. Kuechle: You're good.

Ms. Carlisle: Bryant.

Mr. Kuechle: Yeah, let's go ahead and so we're a little bit over time, but I think we'll be okay. What we'll do is... One second. Just do the approval of the meeting minutes, and then we'll go to break. If you all want to go through that process.

Ms. Carlisle: Thank you very much to Charlie and Madeline for an excellent presentation. Appreciate it. And then we just have 4 minutes until break. As usual, we're off of our agenda a little bit, so we're going to go ahead and break right after this and push our discussion of responses to our last recommendations to right after break. But do I have a movement to approve meeting minutes from December 2023?

Ms. McAlpine: So moved.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Second.

Ms. Carlisle: We have a second? All right. All approved?

Mr. McGuire: Aye. Aye.

Ms. Carlisle: Any anyone disapprove of these minutes? Okay, we're all good. Minutes are approved. And Bryant?

Mr. Kuechle: Yeah, just a couple of quick announcements before we go to break. So, again, public comment is after lunch, so that's at 1:00. We will hold that public comment time at 1:00 regardless of any changes to the remainder of our agenda. So, again, online commenting is full as far as the registration. If you're here in person and you'd like to provide comment, I assume there's still some space for that. So, go ahead and sign in at the desk here. One other announcement, there's also the opportunity for written comments. I think if you go to the advisory Board website, there's an email address where you can submit written comments. Just something to share with the public, online and in person.

If you do anticipate sending written comments, consider submitting those sooner rather than later, providing the Board the opportunity to read them and consider them at the conclusion of these meetings in the recommendations. So, it's a lot. It's great to receive written comments at any time, but if they come in after the recommendations, it's not something the Board can necessarily review and consider when they provide those. So, that's that. Let's take a break. We will reconvene at 10:15 and get started with our review of the recommendations from the last meeting. Thank you. 10:15.

[15-minute break]

Mr. Kuechle: Okay, let's go ahead and get started. So, we'll try to fit in a few things between now and our lunch break. That'll be the reviewing the Board recommendations and responses from the BLM and the Forest Service. This is from the December 2023 Board meeting, and then we'll receive updates from the BLM and the Forest Service. So, Tracy's going to

go ahead and get those recommendations pulled up on the screen so you can all see what the recommendations were put forward in December 2023.

Celeste, when you're ready, if you want to take it from there.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: December 2023

Moved to approve the December 2023 Meeting Minutes as presented. This motion was seconded. All approved and the minutes were accepted.

Discussion: BLM and USFS Responses to Board Recommendations from December 2023 Board Meeting

Ms. Celeste Carlisle, Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Chair

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. This is a slightly painful process. Because some of us cannot read that screen, I think all of us, I will just sum up what the recommendation was and the BLM and/or Forest Service response, and then if there are questions or discussion points, please let me know. And again, folks that are online, wave wildly so that I can notice you all if you have anything to comment on.

Mr. Kuechle: And these are all in your Board packet too.

Ms. Carlisle: Yeah.

Mr. Kuechle: So, you can reference them there.

Ms. Carlisle: Well, sometimes. We're having trouble up here. The first recommendation was that the BLM prioritize and complete the rulemaking and regulations updates and involve Board members in the draft review process so that meaningful policy adjustments can be made. Paul, did you want to go ahead and go into the response and the reasons and then I won't be needing to read it?

Mr. McGuire: Sure. So, as the Board may be aware, we were involved in updating the regulations over the past couple of years. We had actually brought on a special projects officer to assist with that, a former division chief in fact, and made a lot of progress with that. Actually, arrived at a near final draft, at which point various other rulemaking processes within the agency assumed priority, and this effort was essentially put on hold. That happened, I would say earlier in calendar year 2024. With now the change in administration, whether or not or when that will get picked back up and assigned new priority remains to be seen. But I guess the short answer is, we're in a holding pattern with that effort.

Ms. Carlisle: Are there any comments from the Board about that? I know this is out of your hands, I know you all did the part you're supposed to do, but it is frustrating when these rulemaking efforts are necessary for next steps for you all to be able to do, frankly, some things that broad stakeholders can get behind. And so, it could put the agencies into a position of more robust support for the management actions that were occurring. So, I say that for the benefit of any upper-level leadership that might be listening. It is an important effort. I'm grateful that you all did prioritize it. I'm sorry that it sort of hit this wall. Anybody else on that?

Mr. Kuechle: Susan has her hand up.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. Ms. McAlpine.

Ms. McAlpine: Celeste I'm very disappointed to hear this. And again, my comment is also geared towards upper-level management, any staff that may be a reviewing this public hearing for any of our congressional leaders. The time to take action has come and I'm hoping this new administration will come in and work with BLM and the Forest Service quickly. The last year I made the analogy to the fact that this program is on a treadmill, and the mechanics of the treadmill have

gone out of control and they're throwing everybody who's walking on the treadmill off. We need to start to take some really serious action, make some really serious plans. And if and when is not a term that I would like to use in the future. It is, when are we going to make a change and when are we going to start to succeed with this program? So, that's it.

Ms. Carlisle: All right. We'll move to, or did you have a response, or?

Mr. McGuire: Just very quickly, I would just say that the work that's been done to date has been considerable. As I say, we have a near final draft, and I highlight that to emphasize and perhaps reassure the Board that if and when this becomes a priority for the agency under the new administration, all of that work has been done. And so, it would be a pretty short runway, I think, from that point to get something across the finish line.

Ms. Carlisle: The second recommendation-

Ms. McAlpine: I'm sorry. As I said, my comments are not geared to the people who have done the work on this. My comments are geared to upper-level administrators who hopefully will support the work that's been done.

Ms. Carlisle: I Appreciate that, Ms. McAlpine. The second recommendation was towards the adoption programs. We recommended that the BLM follow up on a statistically significant percentage of wild horses and burros that have been placed or sold into private care over the last 5 years, and follow up should identify year the horses or burros were adopted or purchased if the original adopter owners still possesses the animal, if the animals were returned to BLM, transferred, sold or died, and the current use of the animal. In an effort to dig into what was happening to horses that are adopted so that the program can be modified as necessary, so Paul?

Mr. Paul McGuire: Okay, thank you. Yeah, it was a good recommendation, and I think we understand where the Board is going with it. One thing I would highlight, I think Board members are probably well aware, but members of the public may not. A federal agency may only maintain records on American citizens with a legal basis for doing so and being familiar with the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, I know the Board is aware that once an animal is titled, as the Act phrases, it falls outside the purview of the act of the agency. And so, there's not a legal basis for maintaining records on horses once they've been titled.

In effect, the last record that the BLM generates and maintains is the record of title for an animal. Any kind of systematic way of tracking the disposition of animals after they're titled would not be something that the agency has a legal authority to undertake. Though there certainly could be efforts by private groups and organizations with an interest in doing so, and they could rely on certain publicly available data that the agency does maintain. Obviously, much of the information we have is protected by the Privacy Act, and so that could complicate an effort to get to the kind of detail that might be envisioned here. But in terms of the agency's authorities, they're pretty clear under the Act in terms of what we can generate and maintain.

Ms. Carlisle: Any questions or comments? Anybody online?

Ms. McAlpine: Yep, I raised my hand.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay, go ahead.

Ms. McAlpine: Thank you for saying that, and I think it's important for us as a Board to reiterate, again, not necessarily for our field staff or Paul, people at your level. I think part of what we were trying to get at is the continued fundraising by some groups, and I want to speak carefully here, that are continually claiming that wild horses and burros are going through the slaughter pipeline in huge numbers. And we've brought this up and brought this up several times over the years I've been involved with the Board, and we understand when investigations are done, that BLM cannot confirm that that is in fact happening. We were trying to reach a way for BLM and BLM's reputation, and to ensure that our wild

horses and burros are not going down the slaughter line, and in fact are receiving excellent care by many, many thousands of owners across the country who are legitimate owners, who do well by the horses.

There was an interesting comment made with some of the comments that came through that I looked at the other day that mentioned that perhaps the contracts should be changed so that if an owner needs to replace or re-home their animal or animals, that they would be re-homed through BLM in some way. And I thought that was kind of interesting because then the control comes back and this continual promotion, and I get it on my emails all the time about hundreds and thousands of horses going to the slaughter line. It would just help put a cog, I guess, in that wheel. That's all I have to say about that. Thank you.

Ms. Carlisle: Any other comments? I do want to point out that, coming from the perspective of advocacy organizations, much like BLM hears primarily about some of the compliance challenges because those are the things that elevate up to management, the advocacy organizations are capturing sort of the horses that are slipping through the cracks. And that is a legitimate concern. Susan, I agree. We need to be careful about how we talk about it because sometimes there's a perception of intent behind that slipping through the cracks, and then there's just unfortunately policy and law that gets in the way and real limitations that the agencies run up against.

So, I think we're also looking for in this recommendation, and this isn't the right way to do it, I think Paul is pointing out that the agency just can't do this, is looking for ways to ever consider the welfare of these animals that we're removing from public lands, and to think about how we're going to do that as well as we can and improving it as much as we can forever. We never reach a cap and say, "Oh, this is it. We've done a great job." We keep working at how it becomes better and better. And that's a comprehensive approach. It's not just the adoptions, it's the management overall. Anyway, that's my soapbox. Paul?

Mr. McGuire: Sure. Thank you for that, Celeste. One thing I would highlight is that when Congress passed the Act, they intentionally put in a one-year timeframe in there specifically to address what you're talking about, that is to ensure the welfare and well-being of that animal, and they set that timeframe on it. And you'd have to go back in time and get into the heads of the individual members that crafted that. But one can assume that they understood there was a practical limit to how long the agency could maintain oversight of animals. And so, they provided that one-year timeframe after which the animal was permitted to be titled. If the animal was properly cared for one year, the presumption then would be that individual has demonstrated their willingness, intent, and ability to provide that kind of long-term care. And so, that's the framework that we operate under. If there's a concept that that timeframe should be longer, certainly that's something Congress could consider, but I'm sure they considered it quite thoroughly when they originally passed the Act.

Ms. Carlisle: Yep, go ahead.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Just very quickly, and we wanted to get this out in the open so that everybody understands that that was the purpose of this recommendation. The federal government cannot spy on the American people without a court order or without Congress's consent. And so, this is what we're backed up against here. I think you explained it quite well, Paul. I appreciate that explanation. So, yield back, Madam Chair.

Ms. Carlisle: I'm going to push us on to the next one because we tend to be slow getting through these meetings. We recommended that BLM and Forest Service present at the next Board meeting, which is this one, plans to determine ecosystem health and population stabilization by choosing 2 HMAs or territories each and demonstrating how the PopEquus model can be utilized to attain desired management outcomes. Paul.

Mr. McGuire: What I might do here is pull Dr. Griffin up if he doesn't mind coming to the microphone and elaborating on this. I think he was involved in helping to prepare this response. Right over there, Paul. Thank you.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D: Hello. Thank you very much. Thanks, Paul. We will have a presentation about the use of PopEquus that addresses this in a little bit more detail after lunch at 3:00 or after the 3:00 break. But wanted to forecast what that's about

is that we are not yet at the point to be able to use 2 HMAs for this use because PopEquus has only become supported by policy in line with direction to be used for environmental assessments in the last year. And so, the HMAs that are using that now are either in process of preparation, like in a preliminary EA or the EA that has gone to a decision record is in appeal or litigation. So, once we have some HMAs that used PopEquus in the planning stages and they're being, and management is proceeding according to that analysis, then that would probably be the perfect time to specify which couple of HMAs will be these demonstration type areas.

Ms. Pearson: It seems like we ask a lot of questions and we make a lot of recommendations that are either not feasible or attainable in a short time period. I know it's only been a year, but what kind of timeline are you talking?

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: I'd have to review which, I'll try to, before 3:15, I'll try to enumerate how many HMA, how many EAs have used PopEquus since February 2024. I would certainly anticipate that within, by the time of your next meeting, some of these will have decision records or hopefully be through appeals to be able to use those.

Ms. Pearson: Just a quick follow up, is there an opportunity for a CATEX [categorical exclusion] on these across the Board for PopEquus?

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: Oh, PopEquus doesn't... PopEquus is just an analytical tool. It doesn't require NEPA to be used. It's just a tool that has contributed to local managers' decision-making process. So, those are the EA's that I'm talking about.

Ms. Pearson: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Carlisle: Is there a concern that just showing, I mean, I think the Board's intent wasn't this is happening on these HMAs, but more trying to wrap heads around how this is a potential tool for analyzing what's going to happen, because when you're making management decisions, especially when you have multiple management options occurring at one time, determining what your outcome is going to be and how you manage from there gets tricky, especially for someone who's not someone that plugs and chugs numbers, and PopEquus can be very helpful for giving a basic idea of how you move those levers of management to achieve different outcomes. And that's really interesting and it would be really great to see an example of that. But is there trepidation that just showing that put some sort of onus on the agencies that this is used and these are the answers and this is it? I mean, why can't we just see, here's how this tool works and what it can accomplish and what it cannot and what we're looking for?

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D: Yeah, I look forward to going into detail about that with you at 3:15. And it is being used already to compare a bunch of different management options and then give projections about the costs outcomes that could be expected from different management options and the population growth trajectories that might be expected for different options. So, this is a modeling tool that's useful for that already, and not only useful for management, but for anybody's education who wants to look and convince themselves or explore, well, what if we tried this option or what if we did it without removals? What if we did it with this fertility control method?

And so, yeah, it's a great tool, didactically also, for management. And so, the only caution in the response here is that we can't point to an HMA and start to measure population outcomes and foal to adult ratios over time yet. We just can't choose those HMAs yet. But in principle, mathematically, it's a great tool. We'll talk a little more about that this afternoon.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay, thank you. That clarifies my wonderings. Anybody else on that one? Shall we move to the next? Thank you, Paul.

4 was directed at Forest Service and we recommended that the chief advocate for funded multi-year budget line item to support Forest Service's Wild Horse and Burro program, which at this time has no line item in the budget, and that it should also include funds currently owed to the BLM for management and holding of Forest Service horses. So, Dr. Drotar.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: We at our level and within rangeland management have briefed up and up and up requesting this, but the chief is way up there. And some we can only ask, which we've done as much as we can. We tried to promote getting Wild Horse and Burro into the Farm Bill request, but there are a lot of other priorities, and so far we've been disappointed. So, suggestions on where we can go from there, we're always open because we're fully supportive at the Wild Horse and Burro management level but haven't gotten success at the level of the chief yet.

Ms. Carlisle: Commissioner Pearson?

Ms. Pearson: Speaking from my political side, is there an appetite through Congress or do you have congressional representation that would maybe follow this up through funding mechanisms? Because it seems like somebody's dropping the ball and it's not always the agency. I think there's a lot of problems that have been caused by Congress, especially funding ways.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: I agree. We are unable to directly talk to Congress at my level and at my supervisory levels above me. So, that's one of the places that I hope the Board can be of assistance in this regard.

Ms. Pearson: So, you're telling me it's my job, right? I don't blame you.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: I'm not a Board member. I'm not telling you.

Ms. Pearson: I'll take up that challenge.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: Inferring, maybe.

Ms. Carlisle: Anybody else on that one? I think this is one that we're all trying to think of ways to push this. Number 5, and this is our last one. The Board recommended that the BLM request, as appropriate, that the BLM Foundation, which is not their proper name, it's the Foundation for America's Public Lands, serve as a funding source or mechanism for off-range holding costs. So, Paul?

Mr. McGuire: Yes. Thank you. So, yeah, the foundation has made great strides in sort of equipping itself to begin outlining plans for how it could support BLM and the Wild Horse and Burro program in a number of ways. And you may be aware that the way that the foundation is structured vis-a-vis BLM, the agency itself can't really direct the foundation on what we want them to do. We can certainly collaborate with them and identify projects and initiatives, but it's pretty much with the foundation to identify how they want to support us. But I'll give you some examples of some areas where we've been working with them. One in particular is with the idea of public donations. So, the program itself, we may have mentioned at a previous Board meeting, has been working on and is near completion of a donations portal of our own, a donations program of our own.

It's pretty much a micro donation, so relatively small dollar donations, and that has to do with the policies that govern donations to federal agencies. But the foundation presents an opportunity and an avenue for donors to make potentially larger dollar donations to the foundation, which the foundation then can use in a variety of ways to support the program and the agency. Conceivably that could include support for off-range holding. I can't say whether or not that would be where the foundation would want to focus their support, but it's certainly conceivable.

I would think that, and again, be careful not to put any words in the mouth of the foundation, but I would think that their efforts would probably steer more toward supporting private care placement in various kinds of programs and projects that would be in support of that. But we're very engaged with the foundation. They've come forward with a number of other projects, which I think will mature over time and we'll probably have more to report on that for the Board at future meetings, that do in fact focus on that private care placement piece. So, there's a lot of work on that front, their principal players in place. I think there'll be more to report on that in the future.

Ms. Carlisle: Any comments from the Board? Anybody online? I can't see.

Ms. McAlpine: Yep. Me, Susan.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. Go ahead.

Ms. McAlpine: And I'm grateful for the foundation and the individuals who are going to work so hard on this, having been a volunteer for many volunteer agencies over time. The big piece that scares me, and I hope that foundation members will really seriously look at it, is something we already brought up a little bit earlier. The increased urbanization of our country, the increasing encroachment of suburban areas into what were, at one point generally rural areas, the dangerous and continued interfacing of wild horses and burros with the public who have no education that they are in fact wild.

And I really would like to encourage them to seriously think about how they can develop plans so that they can support not only these private care placements, but really look into taking some of the off-range holding costs out of the federal government's budget and providing for a significant portion of those costs over time. We're entering a period where we're going to see a lot of budget cuts. There's a lot of questions about the value of where federal government is spending their money, and I really think the foundation, as they get started, could make a significant contribution in the future.

Ms. Carlisle: All right. I'm going to go ahead and pass it back to Bryant for our next session.

Mr. Kuechle: Thank you, Celeste. Yes. What we're going to do now are the program updates from the BLM and the Forest Service. We are kind of behind schedule here. What I would propose is, we have our lunch break scheduled at 11:45 to 1:00, and then our public comment period starts promptly at 1:00, which we need to stick with that time. So, I would propose that we do a hard stop 11:45 regardless of where we're at on the program updates and we'll pick that back up again after the comment period. But with that, we'll turn it over to Paul McGuire for the BLM program update.

BLM and Wild Horse and Burro Program Update

Paul McGuire, Acting Division Chief, Wild Horse and Burro Program

Mr. Paul McGuire: Okay, very good. Thank you. Okay. All right. Thank you. Yeah, let's go ahead and move to the first slide. So, this is, following slides will cover these, much of which is kind of boilerplate. The Board should be very well aware of much of this. But let's go ahead and move to the next slide. And this touches on what Assistant Director Branham talked about during his opening remarks. These are legal authorities, I know the Board is very well aware of this, and I'll just put it in a little bit of context.

The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act is the operative act that governs the program, but that occurs within the context of the Federal Land Management Policy Act, which is the act that essentially establishes a multiple use mission. So, when you think about the mechanics of how the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act directs the management of wild horses and burros, that all happens within that broader multiple use context. So, once again, I know the Board is very well aware of that, but just highlighting that. Okay, next slide please.

So, the objective of the program is to manage wild horses and burros as an integral part of the public lands in balance with many other resource and values on the public lands, with the ultimate goal of achieving and maintaining healthy herds on healthy public lands. Next slide please.

So, this slide gives some data showing our population levels on the range for the last 10 years. And as you can see from 2014 to about 2020, we saw pretty steady increases over time. Starting in 2020, we began to see more aggressive removals year over year, and a consequent decline in numbers on range over time. To the point where last year, in March, our estimate was about 73,570 animals on the range, which is certainly an improvement from what it had been just a few years

prior. But, as you can see, that remains nearly 3 times over the aggregate appropriate management level across the range. Next slide please.

So, this shows kind of a shorter timeframe, the number of animals that have been gathered, and removed over the past 5 years. We saw in 2020, '21, and '22, pretty substantial gathered numbers which contributed to those on-range populations declines we saw in the previous slide. One of the consequences of that was that we essentially maxed out our off-range holding capacity. So, when you jump to 2023, excuse me, you see that those numbers are not nearly as high, and a major factor for that has to do with the off-range holding constraints, and capacity there. There are other factors as well, but that would be the principal reason why that trendline didn't remain positive after 2022.

With that sort of respite in 2023, we were able to then resume some pretty substantial removal numbers into 2024. The outlook, it's not depicted here, but the outlook for 2025 is going to encounter the same constraints that we saw in 2023. We're looking at probably gathering somewhere in the neighborhood of 10,000 animals in 2025. Chad, you can nod your head if that's correct, and that is largely a function of off-range holding capacity. Next slide please.

So, jumping over to off-range, these are some key metrics that we track. We conducted last year 175 events. These are defined very specifically. These are either events that occurred in facilities, or they were satellite events, the off-site events that are held in arenas, or online corral events. So, taken all together, were 175 events where animals were offered for adoption or sale. Among those, there were almost 30,000, 29,764 animals were presented either initially, or subsequently, if they weren't originally adopted. I just lost the display on this screen. If we could get that back? There we go. We're back.

Then you can see there's a further breakdown there. There were 5,166 adoptions, 1,509 sales, 20 transfers. We conducted 6,236 compliance inspections, and we titled a little over 4,900 animals over the course of the year. And then, a further breakdown. Of the animals that were adopted, about 3,871 were adopted under the Adoption Incentive Program. The remaining were not. Those that were not adopted under the AIP [Adoption Incentive Program], either were trained animals, which are not eligible for the AIP, or they just may have been the election of the adopter themselves not to participate in AIP. That happens sometimes. People don't want to necessarily give more information to the government than is necessary, and they may elect not to participate in the AIP. But as you can see, the largest percentage of our adoptions actually occur under the AIP.

And then finally, we've got a breakdown of our off-range facilities. That's kind of a snapshot, because that fluctuates over the course of a year. But we had about 23,000 animals in corrals, almost 44,000 in pastures, another 1,200 in our public off-range pastures. Those are the pastures that the public can visit, and learn more about the animals in the program. So, about 68,000 animals in off-range holding, over the course of 2024. Next slide please.

So, this is kind of a key milestone that we achieved. We've been working on a couple of solicitations for additional pasture, and corral capacity, and those solicitations were posted in December, and they close, I think middle of this month. Once the proposals are received for those, it has the potential to increase not only our off-range pasture capacity by a significant amount, but also to recapture, and possibly even gain new corral facilities where animals can be trained. So, that's part of the focus of those 2 solicitations that came out.

Once the solicitations close, just by a little bit of... In the weeds for folks who might be interested, there's a lengthy process that goes into evaluating those proposals. There's a NEPA, that is a National Environmental Policy Act evaluation that must occur, which includes a cultural analysis, and so that process can take quite some time. Whether or not there would be an actual gain in capacity in calendar year 2025 is an open question, but I won't foreclose on the possibility that we could see an increase in capacity this calendar year, which would support efforts to continue removal from the range. So that was a very important milestone, and we're very happy to report that. Next slide please.

The Online Corral continues to be a major platform for the program to present animals and place them into private care. As you can see, we had 7 events total, Online Corral last year, which is a pretty aggressive schedule. That's more than one

every other month. That requires a lot. There's a huge dovetail of effort involved in supporting the Online Corral within our facilities to prepare those animals and present them. And so 7 events over the course of a 12-month period is pretty aggressive. You can see the numbers of animals that were offered, and ultimately placed through those 7 events. So, I would mark that as a significant success.

We saw too, that there were a great many pickup locations that were made available for the public to retrieve their animals, and that's important. Part of the whole concept of the Online Corral is to create convenience for the public in being able to select animals and pick them up near where they are. Then you can see just as another tidbit there, the average bid on animals in the Online Corral is a little over $300. That actually understates things a little bit. There was at least one animal last year that I think got bid up to $18,000. So, every now and then there's an animal that pops up that people want it really bad, and they're willing to pay for it. But overall, $301. We don't have here the aggregate figure for the amount of revenue that was raised, but it was significant, and we could certainly provide that to the Board.

Partnerships. Another key accomplishment this past year was successfully awarding a number of new partnerships. I think as the Board is aware, we had one key partnership with the Mustang Heritage Foundation for quite a number of years. That agreement expired at the end of September '23, and we immediately undertook an effort to recruit new partners. As you can see there, we ended up identifying, and funding 5 new partnerships. That first one was with a group called Forever Branded, that's a national partnership, so it's managed out of the headquarters. That organization proposes a program similar in many respects to what you may remember as the trainer incentive program. I don't think it'll be called that, but it'll have similar structure. That's another way that we can encourage adoption, by placing animals with trainers, to gentle them, and make them more adoptable.

The other 4 partnerships there are managed out of the state offices where those partnerships exist, and we work with those states to evaluate those and identify the appropriate funding level. So, each of those will provide its own benefits, either in terms of animal training, education, and outreach, and other benefits to the program. We anticipate that if we hit on all cylinders, these partnerships could potentially place upwards of 11,000 animals into private care over the 5-year period of the agreements. Okay. I think we can go to the next slide please.

All right, so this is a funding chart. This is always fun to look at. You can notice there, the type is pretty small, but the 2 large pieces of the pie is off-range holding. So, the green slice is... That's our pastures, and then the purple slice is our corrals. And taken together, they consume about 2-thirds of our program budget, 2-thirds of our expenditures, I should say, are devoted to those 2 efforts. I think as the Board is aware, that is the major... I'm not sure the best way to describe it, but it's a sandbag. It makes it difficult to devote the resources necessary to the other forward-leaning mission imperatives, namely the removal of animals from the range. So, I think that this pie chart depicts that as clearly as anything. We can go to the next slide please.

So, our goals for 2025. We want to continue our progress toward reaching AMLs. I mentioned earlier, our current gather schedule anticipates the removals of about 10,000. Success in that will depend, in large part, not just on congressional appropriation and direction, but also on our ability to increase our off-range holding capacity. That is a major choke point, as I mentioned earlier.

So, we've got about 10,000 removals, anticipate about 1,200 fertility control treatments, and then we say 10,000 animals placed into private care. Quite honestly, there's no cap to our goal to place animals into private care. We'll place as many as we can, but you have to have a target. So, our target is 10,000. That's an aggressive target. We haven't placed that many animals into private care in, oh, almost 30 years. It's been a very long time, and not for lack of effort.

It has to do with what Ms. McAlpine was talking about earlier, is sort of a diminishing population of prospective adopters, and other factors. I won't put it all on that, but certainly that is part of it, but it's not beyond the realm of possibility that we could reach that high water market again, with all of the tools that we have at our disposal. So that's our goal. 10,000 animals into private care in FY '25. Next slide please. That is it. I'm happy to answer any questions

Ms. McAlpine: I just want to say thank you, Paul, for that. Some really, really good data. My question is, I've pretty much gone through the whole package that we were given, and made some copies for myself of all of these statistics. Is this package in the materials that we received last week?

Mr. McGuire: The presentation itself may not be.

Ms. McAlpine: Okay.

Mr. McGuire: I will tell you, it is posted on the Wild Horse and Burro website under the advisory Board tab, so you can certainly find it there, or we can get it to you directly. I don't think that's a problem.

Ms. McAlpine: Okay. Yeah, if you could do that, that would be easier, because then I can just print the data slides that I need. So, that would be great. Thank you.

Mr. McGuire: Thank you.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Hey, Paul, this is Tom Lenz. So, you've got down about 5 million for population growth suppression, and you're planning on putting that for 1,400 horses that you're going to treat. So, it can't cost $40,000 a horse. So what's involved in... Where's that figure of $5 million coming from?

Mr. McGuire: If I understand your question, you're asking about the $5 million for fertility control application?

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Right. That you've got in your budget. It's the $5 million for population growth suppression, and you're planning on treating about 1,400 horses, that comes out to about 40,000 a horse.

Mr. McGuire: Yeah.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: What's involved in that number in your budget? It's got to be more than just fertility.

Mr. McGuire: Yeah. It is. No, you're exactly right. So, obviously the agent itself doesn't cost nearly that much. It factors in the actual cost of gathering the animals. When you're undertaking a operation to gather animals for the purpose of applying fertility control, and then returning them to the range, you have to consider the operational costs of that gather as part of the fertility control cost. In many ways, if the only thing you report is the cost of the fertility control agent itself, you're going to be reporting nickels and dimes, and that's an inaccurate reflection of the actual cost, and the actual level of effort required to achieve that fertility control application number.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Okay, thanks.

Ms. Carlisle: Dr. Iacona?

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Thank you, Paul. I had a question. Well, as you were going through those numbers, I was just doing a couple of calculations here, because the picture I have in my head is that there's a 20% population growth rate of the horses on the range. Is that the sort of... That's like the middle range, right?

Mr. McGuire: That's kind of the thumbnail. Yeah, that's the recruitment rate.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Yeah. So, if you're taking 10,000 horses off this year, and there's 73,000 horses out on the range, that's not even stabilizing the population. We have to take, what did I have? 15,000 off a year, in order to stabilize population growth rate. So, how do you make these decisions about the types of actions that you can choose between in order to... It

seems like stabilizing population growth rate is probably the top priority. I mean, I don't know if that is the top priority, but this year's set of actions is getting close, but it's not there.

Mr. McGuire: No, you're exactly right. And it's the difference between mapping it out on paper, and then in actual fact. And so, I go back to the point that our gather schedule is driven to a very large extent on what our off-range holding capacity is. So, we might have a desire, and indeed, do have a desire, to gather above the recruitment rate for all of the reasons that you just stated. But if the off-range space is not there, then it's just not a possibility.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: And I guess then it's just an acknowledgement that next year we'll have a bigger amount that would have to be gathered, if population growth stability is what we're going for?

Mr. McGuire: So yeah, if you look at the math, that would certainly be the case. I would note though, in tandem with our gather schedule, we have these efforts to acquire additional off-range corrals, and pastures. And so, when those come online, that's going to change the dynamic. That's going to change the calculus. And so, we could potentially gather more animals, if not in 2025, then in 2026. Another part of that calculus, aside from the ability to acquire the additional space, would be the level of funding that's provided to the agency, not only to maintain that space, but then to conduct the gather operations themselves. But the major choke point when it comes to decisions regarding gathers has to do with off-range space.

Dr. Iacona, PhD.: Right, that's the limiting factor.

Mr. McGuire: The physical space.

Dr. Iacona, PhD.: The one other thought I had in this calculus is, is there variation in the population growth rates across different HMAs?

Mr. McGuire: I think that's fair to say. I might ask Chad to come up. He can probably speak more intelligently to that. But, we have 175 HMAs. Certainly, the recruitment rate varies from HMA to HMA. But, on the whole, we have kind of a thumbnail of 20% recruitment rate. And so, that's not just a foaling rate, that also considers their survival rate of those foals. But at the end of the day, about 20% year over year. Is it more in some, and less than others? Sure. But that's kind of the figure that we work with.

Dr. Iacona, PhD.: Which is a huge population growth rate.

Mr. McGuire: It is. It is. That's one of the reasons why it's critical. You may have noticed, I think in 2020 or 2019, we were bumping up against 100,000 horses on the range. Now, that's a key figure, because the practical maximum number of animals that we can remove from the range under the best conditions is about 20,000 animals a year. That's a practical maximum. It has to do with a lot of logistical considerations, but that's a max. Well, if that's the max, if you had 100,000 horses on the range, with a 20% annual recruitment rate, that's 20,000 animals every year. And so, the best we could do is tread water at 100,000 animals in perpetuity. And so, it's vital that we avoid that circumstance. I think the program is very well aware of that.

Dr. Iacona, PhD.: And I guess just for the public's knowledge, I was trying to look at... I'm from Florida, the Burmese Python population growth rate, it seems to be about 30% based on my quick Googling right now. This is a giant population growth rate for a population of anything. The population growth rate of the United States at the moment is less than 1% for people. This is a population growth rate that is not a stable population by any means. Thank you.

Mr. Kuechle: Mr. Higbee, you had your hand up earlier. I was just checking to see if you still had a question or a comment.

Commissioner Higbee: Yes, I had a comment that several years ago, when we first started this process, one of the things that come up was sponsors for off-range holding, like the holding facilities. In other words, if you put out there, you have a horse, you sponsor this horse, you get its picture, you get updates on it, and you can live in the middle of New York City, and still own a horse, or have reference to a horse.

Mr. McGuire: Yeah. Thank you. And that actually points to, I mentioned earlier, the donations program that we're standing up within the agency. It's very similar to that. It's not exactly... As it's currently envisioned, it's not exactly a adopt a horse type of platform, but it's an opportunity for people to engage with the program through donations, and focus on particular areas that they're interested in, that they can receive updates, and information.

So, for example, if a person was particularly interested in off-range holding, or particularly interested in private care, or particularly interested in HMAs in a certain state, then they can make that election, and they would essentially be added to a list, where we can target that individual, and curate information for them about their area of interest. And so, not only will the donations portal potentially raise revenue to support program operations, but importantly, it will also serve as a educational tool for the public.

Whether or not it will generate the kind of revenue that would make a substantial dent in program operation, in the program budget, I think that remains to be seen, but that's certainly part of the design, is a revenue generating tool for people who are interested in supporting the program, who may not otherwise be able to support the program through adoption. That's very much in the works, and as I mentioned, I would hope that by the next Advisory Board meeting, there would be an opportunity to showcase that portal at that time.

Commissioner Higbee: Thank you.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Paul, I appreciate these numbers you guys have come up with, and the work you've done. So, given long-term planning, when does the Bureau expect to be off this treadmill, and be at AML across the Board? There has to be a plan. There's got to be a date out there somewhere. When is that?

Mr. McGuire: Yeah. The program was engaged in a planning effort involving an executive leadership team over about the past 18 months to map out a ten-year plan to achieve AML. And it's very aggressive. It imagined removing 20,000 animals a year, placing into private care at least 10,000 a year. There were a whole lot of other factors and assumptions that had to fall into place for this ten-year plan to succeed, among them, acquiring additional off-range holding space. A lot of factors that had to align perfectly in order for it to work.

On paper, it worked. It got to AML in 10 years. Planning is a continual undertaking for the program. But I think it was Dwight Eisenhower who said that planning is essential, but futile. No plan survives first contact. But that planning effort remains essential to what we do, and it provides a focus to our efforts. The 20,000 removals, that remains a target. Now, we can't do it in 2025, because we have a physical constraint, off-range holding, but that doesn't mean it's not still an objective. When we can, potentially in 2026, increase removals to 20,000, then we certainly will, because that's consistent with the plan to reach AML.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Absolutely. A plan is better than no plan, which is essentially what we've been doing for 40 years, more or less. Maybe it's not that simplistic, but that's good to hear. That should be on the letterhead, "AML in 10 years," so that everybody knows this, and everybody can get on the same page. I would encourage you to advertise that as much as possible, and so we can get all of the partners on Board, everybody that's associated with this, and sort of make that the mantra, "AML in 10 years."

Mr. McGuire: Yeah, and I appreciate that. The only reservation I have is that the plan itself is a continual work in progress. If we were to-

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Well, yeah, it's a plan.

Mr. McGuire: If we were to nail that to the front door, it is going to be different tomorrow, because facts will have changed. And so, a little bit of hesitancy about committing to things over a 10-year period that very well are going to shift in pretty short order.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: No, I absolutely understand. But if you don't commit to something, you're never going to commit to it. Right?

Mr. McGuire: Well, I can assure you, agency leadership is very committed to the pillars of that plan, which include 20,000 removals, which include, actually, even a more aggressive goal than 10,000 private care placements. There's been a lot of discussion, and emphasis on 20,000 private care placements. That's a moonshot, but that's there. And so, there's a tremendous commitment by agency leadership to uphold, and advance those pillars of that plan. Now, the details are going to shift all over the place, but that commitment is there.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Thank you.

Mr. Kuechle: Let's see. Mr. Branham turned his video on, so he may want to respond here.

Mr. Branham: Yes, in general, I'd say Paul is spot on. At the highest levels of the bureau, there's commitment to getting to AML. The challenges we have are numerous, many of which were already laid out here earlier today. Again, keep in mind one of the things that we deal with in addition to some of the riders on appropriations and other things, the timing of the funding, is things like continuing resolutions, and uncertainty about future budgets. If you take a look at the difference between typical appropriation levels between the House and Senate, and the president's budget, they're usually pretty far from each other. And just comparing that to what we actually need to achieve, what we've laid out in the plan, and that's the challenge we usually are dealing with. We are pretty good at the numbers of horses on the landscape, what it takes to get them off, what it takes to get them adopted, and all the things, the thing that we have no control over is the amount, or the timing of the funding, and that by itself is one of the most challenging factors that we frequently find ourselves dealing with.

We've been very thoughtful about what is it going to take to get this all unbalanced? But there's certainly a high number of factors that are outside of our control of... The biggest of is the funding piece. And then second to that, I would say is the interest of the public to adopt animals. We think there is interest out there, but it's the amount that will be equivalent to what we need to take off-range, it's a different story, but some of the things I've heard here earlier in some of the presentations are encouraging. But we do certainly need to, I guess, address this on multiple fronts, and some of those fronts we're going to talk about a little later. We can talk about the adoptions and the donations portal and things like that.

How do you grow the pie, the pie of the amount of funding available, and not be only relying on the funding coming from Congress? And if we can do that, and increase awareness from those who are not normally engaged in the world of horses, and those certainly who are not as familiar with the public lands, and the challenge of the number of horses on the landscape, trying to get them more engaged in this is another big piece. We've been looking at lots of different ways, and we are very open to outside of the box thinking creative ideas and input. We welcome these questions and we appreciate this robust conversation. Thanks. Pass it back.

Mr. Kuechle: We've got some hands online, Miss McAlpine and Mr. Higbee.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay, I'm going to throw myself in here just for a moment. And then Ms. McAlpine, and Commissioner Higbee, you'll be next. But, I wrote down a lot of things, but I'm just going to say one, and that is that your absolute linchpin in this issue is fertility control. That has broad stakeholder support, that's diverse, and that a lot of different stakeholders can get behind. Not all of them, absolutely not all of them. But, when the efforts seem to be behind gather removal, and I'll say magical placements of lots of horses, the horse market is pretty well saturated. The horse market is also fickle. I don't know of any market analysis that's been done by the agencies to look at what might be shaping the

market over the next handful of years. But, 10,000 seems pie in the sky to me. 20,000 seems beyond a moonshot. It seems like leaving the solar system.

But, the reality is, fertility control keeps being pushed because it's not easy, because it's not logical. It isn't. Obviously, achieving AML before you implement fertility control is the most efficient, if your goal is to achieve AML and hold it there, obviously. But we don't have that reality on the ground right now. I mean, the argument that, "Oh, we can't leave horses behind out there, and do some fertility control and remove some, because there's no appetite for leaving them above AML." Well, they are above AML. If we can slow the reproductive growth rate of those that are behind on the range, we're ahead of where we were 2 years ago, 3 years ago.

I am reiterating, again, I think the Board will try to be working on a recommendation that incorporates part of this idea, that unless fertility control... Unless the general stakeholders around this issue don't feel that fertility control is taken seriously, and is becoming one of the priorities, that support for the amount and timing of funding that is necessary is going to crumble. The stakeholders and the people that can lobby, which is not us as a Board, and it's not you all as agency folks, it'll be gone. I am encouraging the broader strategic think through this, whether you are a supporter of fertility control or not, it is going to be what enables us to move forward, and achieve those other things that are also part of that response. And then, I don't know, maybe you want to respond to that first, or I'll kick it to Ms. McAlpine.

Mr. McGuire: No, please go ahead.

Ms. Carlisle: Ok

Ms. McAlpine: Yeah, I just want to jump into that too, Celeste, and support what you were saying. Just as I was listening to this, we have roughly 68,000 horses, and or burros in federal care right now. If you take off 20,000 a year, you still have 10,000 a year you need to maintain, which is 100,000 over 10 years. And so, you've placed 100,000, but now we've got 168,000 under federal care, with a lifespan of 20 to 30 years.

Of course, there are some that are lost to natural attrition. And notice, I said natural attrition, please. And really, the focus needs to become from a humane perspective, for the horses, for the burros, for BLM field staff, for the environment, and everything that lives on it, and for the advocacy groups, for BLM to take an absolutely serious, and huge effort in fertility control for both sexes. The treadmill has to stop. And in 10 years, there is not going to be the same amount of rural space for BLM, or anybody, to continue to think about keeping what? 100, 168,000 horses or more in a humane manner, for the federal government.

Ms. Carlisle: Commissioner Higbee?

Commissioner Higbee: Yeah. I would just like to back up a little bit to Mr. Perryman's comment about having a ten-year goal that you could headline with that in mind, coming from local government and from, I was a county commissioner for 8 years and served in county government most of my life, by doing that it would give the local governments the ability to go and lawful at state, lobby, state and federal and counties to actually go lobby congress, lobby their congressmen to help you with the funding that you need. That would give us a huge tool in that tool box to make a difference because if you can go show a congressman or a senator that there's an end to this, that one of these days, like our senators here in Nevada, if one of these days, in fact I had one of them a year ago, tell me, "Is there any way you can make this go away? This looks really bad."

I said, "Well Senator, it's in your backyard. Somehow you need to deal with it. This is your problem just as much as it is the county's local governments and the users that use the federal lands, the public lands, and if you had some that, even if you didn't meet that goal of 10 years, at least we would have the opportunity to have a tool to go lobby with."

Ms. Carlisle: And in the interest of time, I think we'll be able to continue this discussion a little bit more in our subcommittee report out tomorrow. I think we have some more presentations that are going to happen, Bryant?

Mr. Kuechle: We have the Forest Service update and I guess I would ask Dr. Drotar if your presentation portion of that would fit within a 20-minute window, then we can move forward. But then I would ask the Board members, please write your questions down because we do need to make a hard stop for lunch so we can stay on time for our comment period. We'll return after lunch with questions after the comment.

U.S. Forest Service, Wild Horse and Burro Program Update

Dr. Teresa Drotar, DVM

Dr. Drotar, DVM: My presentation is going to be much shortened after Charlie and they covered a lot of Region 5 and so yes, I can get you in 20 minutes easily.

Mr. Kuechle: Great. Let's go.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: All right, go ahead and get the presentation up. But as you know, I'm Teresa Drotar. I am a veterinarian, but I am also the National Wild Horse and Burro program lead and this year I will say that it was hard writing this because it's discouraging that we're still where we are even though we've got plans. We continue to be underfunded in the Wild Horse and Burro program management. What we would shoot for is parity with what congress funds BLM and we're not there obviously, that's a discouraging thing that we haven't had control over. However, we've made a lot of headway. Placement rates in our facilities are still 95 to a hundred percent, which is great. We are talking constantly with BLM to transfer horses that are in BLM facilities that are forced service horses back to Forest Service facilities and taking charge, being better partners and placing those horses out of Forest Service facilities.

It'll come up. It's okay. And then one of the latest developments that I'll talk about are some of the emergency actions that we've taken along with BLM, just this fall. Current estimates, yes, we're about 3 times... Go ahead to slide 3. There we go. About 3 times AML in both burros and horses. One of the things that we have very good figures in some territories and not good figures in others, but that's our current estimate that we are about 3 times over what AML should be. Some places going well, some places not. I'm going to go region by region and I'm listing certain states, but keep in mind that the Forest Service region map isn't quite by the state as in BLM, so essentially it's bits of other states, but it's Montana and North Dakota. We only have the one territory that is a joint management area at the prior Mountains.

Forest Service only has about 10% of the area and the horses in that particular territory. BLM and Forest Service, have been working on getting the NEPA and the territory and HMA plans completed and those are getting very close. Hopefully we'll be able to get those. Any horses that are gathered off of region one will go to the Modoc, the Double Devil corrals for placement, those horses will not be under BLM processing care and we hope to continue that. Region 3 is our next big one. Region 2 doesn't have any horses on Forest Service lands, they're all on BLM lands. Region 3 is where we have the most wild horses and burros currently in the country we have 5 active territories, both wild horse and burro territories. We do have a facility, Bloomfield Corrals and Northern New Mexico that we've talked about in the past.

This corral is unfortunately closed right now and probably for an extended period for lack personnel. We have not been able to fill positions. There are only 2 to run those corrals, and that's likely to continue for an extended period because there is no money for hiring new people. However, there is an active collaborative up there close to those corrals that are willing to help once we get that up and going. That is a positive for that area. We also have another territory that is under function at Heber in Arizona. It's nearing completion of their NEPA and the territory plan that's been in the works and we've been talking about it being near completion for 2 years, but it's moving at this point that we can have some action there. There are a lot of horses that have, and some confusion as to what horses belong to the tribes versus belong to the Wild Horse and Burro Act.

But that's being worked out and they've been working on stockpiling materials to build a corral facility there. In the future we hope to have something there for processing those animals. One of the things that R3 has dealt with a lot are the horses that are not wild horses. They are unauthorized animals out there and moving some of those horses off. That's one of the issues that they deal with and have been working on and doing very well. Moving on to our Region 4, that's primarily Utah and Nevada. Most of the territories there, there are more territories than any place else, but really, we have more

horses that are wild horses in Region 3, but still an awful lot. Most of these are joint management areas and there's a lot of cooperation with BLM on working on what's going on in those territories. One of those is North Hills, next slide, and North Hills is where one of the emergency actions has taken place this fall.

There was an emergency action required due at the North Hills due to the drought and loss of water sources for the horses on there. Charlie mentioned that they received about 70 horses over at the Double Devil's Garden from this emergency action and they weren't in great shape, between the 2 agencies, it was extremely important for the welfare of those horses to remove those animals and get them off the territory where they can be cared for. That was one of the emergency actions that we had this fall. Next slide. I'm going to be zipping through these pretty fast cause they already went through region 5, which is California, and they had 9 active territories. I have listed 8 on this slide and here's where we have the Double Devil's Corral that Charlie talked about. Let's move on to the next slide and we're going to move through these pretty quickly.

Charlie went through what's going on at the Double Devil's Corrals and they've been moving horses in and out pretty quickly. Right now, there's some openings, but those are slated to be filled very quickly. Let's move to the next slide. We do have a couple of research projects. We don't have money to fund the research projects, but when there are other places where they get that funding, we do support that very greatly and hopefully some of the projects that are going on will benefit BLM also as well as in general in the future. Next slide. She talked a lot about the partnerships developing more and more, we'll move on to that. Let's talk a little bit about the Inyo National Forest, the Montgomery Pass, Charlie primarily talked about this. This is an area where there has been huge impact on natural resources in the area around Mono Lake.

The NEPA is almost completed hopefully that decision we listed here, we hoped it in January, but it may be February when we are able to sign a decision there to remove animals and to take that area back into control. There is a local government group that is very supportive of getting horse management and hopefully fertility management in hand as we move forward. The state of California also has some of the land around there where these horses are residing and impacting. So there is some outside support to get that under control. So hopefully this summer the Inyo, the Montgomery Pass Management will be better under control and then at that point applying fertility control in the process. Let's move on to the next slide.

The next area is Oregon, Region 6 and there are 2 main territories there that have seen quite a bit of action. Let's move on to the next slide. Murderer's Creek is the second place where there has been an emergency action that's still in progress. This area has a lot of BLM land that is the range land and then some of the territory for Murderer's Creek on the Malheur National Forest is more forested, but the Rail Ridge fire went through there and burned up most of actually the winter, the winter forage area for the horses. It's been very badly impacted and it's a joint management area where emergency removals have been authorized because that winter forage has been pretty well wiped out. Very recently, just this week they reached the 210 mark of horses that went to the BLM corrals and now we are expecting the next 150 to go to the Double Devil's Corrals. Some of those horses, the body condition score is not good, we're hoping that to be able to pick those up off territory.

The NEPA decision hopefully will be completed very, very soon that the, extreme, up to 2 years holding of those horses won't become necessary. We'll be able to put them up for adoption, but that's in progress right now. They're still baiting horses and moving horses every day off of that territory. So that emergency action is still in progress and it's one of the areas that we're making some progress in that regard. Next slide. The big summit Wild Horse territory in the Ochoco National Forest has been under litigation for some time, and I have on here because this was developed a month ago, but the appeals court decision just came down in favor of the action for the Forest Service so that territory plan can move forward. That's a positive thing for management of that area. There aren't a lot of little, these are kind of little horses on there.

They're kind of cute little things and they plan to still, if we get money and there are still some searching for outside funds to help with the Wild Horse Adoption Center and move forward with management of that center, but getting that through, that will be moving forward pretty quickly. The next one. Yeah, we have a lot of horses in BLM facilities because there

are a lot of joint management areas and so often we don't have the capacity and they have been moved into BLM corrals and that is a concern for both agencies because we have horses out there lifetime holding on the BLM contracted pastures. We in Forest Service have not had a consistent funding that we could actually do any of those kind of contracts and we don't want to interfere or we don't want to be in competition with BLM.

We have about 1300 horses right now that are assigned to Forest Service that are out there on pastures and we are concerned about those costs as well as BLM. Right now we only have about 70 animals in maintenance care in BLM corrals, but still that BLM is footing the bill often and we feel badly about that. We've put that up and there's more awareness in our management. We were able to transfer $2.2 million to BLM for some of that care this year. We still owe a big bill though there has been some success with getting BLM to tell our management that we need to have continued funds that will be transferred to BLM for care of horses that are for service responsibility. We know they're out there and we've had some success but not enough. So next slide please. Yes, our funding is a big issue for Forest Service.

We have developed a strategic plan, a 10-year strategic plan. We haven't talked about that because it depends on having consistent funding be able to carry it out. What's in that strategic plan is to be a better partner and it's the next slide for BLM in funding. That's one of the things that we have. We do not anticipate a specific wild horse and burro allocation again in 2025, which for me is really discouraging. But if we could get the funding that we need, we do have a plan out there and it includes a lot of, not only removals but some consistent contraceptive action including working with a partner hopefully where we would have the darting, the remote darting so that we could control it a little bit better, but we don't know. We're looking for creative sources for extra funding opportunities that work with the Forest Service as a general agency. Obviously, fires are a major emphasis in the Forest Service and that's one of the reasons that we don't get the funding that we need because there are so many other issues that take priority in the Forest Service.

Next slide. So yes, our current strategies, treat with the contraceptives. We are looking forward very much to having better contraceptives that are longer term for both sexes as Ms. Alpine keeps talking about, that we can do that more efficiently out there on the range. It is difficult. There are some major hurdles to making it work, but we're looking forward to all of those research opportunities that we can make that work better. We are continuing to design management plans to reach AML. One of the problems in the agencies have been how long it takes to do our NEPAs and how long it takes to develop these plans. And you just have to keep moving forward.

Public awareness on the definition of what a wild horse is. Again, region 3 deals with this a lot that there are horses that are not under the Wild Horse and Burro Act that are still free roaming. And so having to designate which ones we can work under the act in which we can't are important. Building and staffing facilities is something that we really would like to get more funding and the ability to do that and the partnerships developing and nurturing these partnerships, they keep coming up and that is one of the things we'd like to keep doing and then to be a better partner to BLM, that's one of our major goals. Yes, any questions that you have, we're open.

Mr. Kuechle: We're actually going to hold questions.

Mr. Kuechle: If you have questions, please write them down because we're at the beginning of our lunch hour right on time. This is the way the next little bit will go; we have an hour and 15 minutes for lunch. We have our public comment period time starting promptly at one o'clock. When we conclude public comment, then we'll come back to questions for Teresa. For all of those that signed up for public comment, in person or online, we have a lot of people that signed up for public comment, which is great, but it also means we really need to hold folks to the 2-minute commenting window. Just be prepared for that amount of time and we should be able to get through everybody. We'll get through everybody, guaranteed, but we may actually end up going long a little bit on our time even on public comment. We'll see everybody back here at one o'clock.

Break for Lunch for 1-hour and 15 minutes

Public Comment Period (1)

Bryant Kuechle, Facilitator, The Langdon Group

Mr. Kuechle welcomed the Board and members of the public back to the meeting. He then went over the rules for public comment, either virtually or in person.

In Person Comments

Denise Bolbol

Hello, my name is Denise Bolbol. I work with the Cloud Foundation. There's nothing I can say today that hasn't been said thousands of times at these meetings in the past. I deliver these comments as we prepare for a new administration, one that says it will be responsive to the people. Polls show that Trump supporters, independents, and Democrats all support protecting and humanely managing wild horses on our public lands and reducing livestock if necessary to do so. Yet the Bureau of Land Management and this Board ignores the public. The trajectory of the BLM mismanagement shows the agency's intent is to destroy our wild herds. Nothing can make this clearer than the use of the sterilizing agent, GoniCon, which BLM is finally acknowledging can sterilize with as few as 2 applications. But that's not good enough for BLM. The agency has also been funding the development of a one-shot sterilant called OGFA.

These sterilizing agents, along with the overall mismanagement spell doom for America's wild herds. Not only do these sterilizing agents permanently sterilize, they also destroy reproductive organs and natural hormone production, which are essential for natural wild behaviors. The NAS has repeatedly told this agency since the Reagan administration and all the way through the Obama administration, BLM management of wild horses and burros must be responsive to public preferences. This Board and the agency ignore the NAS and the American public. The prior mountain wild horse herd is the perfect example. All the horses are documented, the lineage is documented. There are volunteers to dart PZP and BLM refuses to work with the public to humanely manage this herd on the range and the roundups.

The same situation repeats at numerous herds across the west. We want our wild horses and burros humanely managed. That means no fertility control methods that destroy reproductive organs, no management actions that cause social chaos, such as sex ratio skewing, and a reassessment of AMLs to be reflective of the Wild Horse and Burro Act that states in plain language all herd areas should be managed principally for the welfare of wild horses and burros.

We're tired of the status quo.

Carolyn Mira

Good afternoon. My name is Carolyn Mira and I'm the grassroots advocacy and campaign manager with the American Wild Horse Conservation. And for the past several decades, wild horses and burros have been inhumanely rounded up through costly and traumatic helicopter chases. But the devastation does not stop there and continues to occur in holding facilities and in kill pens. And despite recommendations from Congress and the National Academy of Science, the BLM continues to snowball down a counterproductive path costing the lives of these animals. And while AWHC poaches for the halt of helicopter roundups, we also recognize the need for transparency during roundups as they're the current primary method of management. So today I ask that you recommend that the BLM and US Forest Service install and use cameras on every helicopter and every wrangler during operations. The need for cameras was best exemplified this past year at the Twin Peaks Roundup, a stallion flipped over the panels to escape nearly crushing a wrangler.

A black stallion was chased for miles during the Triple B roundup. And when he could no longer run, wranglers proceeded to rope him and push him past his limits, leading him to collapse and he was eventually euthanized an hour later due to acute intestinal compromise. And during the Blue Wing complex roundup, a horse collapsed from exhaustion to then be kicked and yanked on by wranglers. And despite this incident, the roundup received a 99% for the COP assessment. Not to mention that the roundup process has increasingly become less and less transparent to taxpayers and advocates placing public observation sites more than a mile away from the trap site with obstructed views and multiple restrictions. This fails to allow proper public oversight and accountability.

In order to bring more transparency to the fragile process, we once again ask you recommend installing cameras on helicopters and every wrangler during roundups and make those recordings publicly available to ensure proper handling of horses and burros and create independent oversight. The public also continues to push this initiative with over 64,000 actions calling for camera installation on helicopters and wranglers. The humane treatment of our wild horses and burros has always been a priority and should continue to be for the next several decades. And by installing and using cameras on helicopters and wranglers, it will be the first step towards creating public trust and ensuring humane treatment of our horses and burros. Thank you very much.

Janet Fitch

Hi, good afternoon. My name is Janet Fitch and I'm a resident of Contra Costa County in Pinole, California, just north of San Francisco. First, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to join you and share with you my thoughts and concerns about wild horses and burro management on US government land. I'm here today as a concerned citizen and volunteer ambassador with the American Wild Horse Conservation. As a concerned citizen with a passion for the protection of all animals, I believe that the BLM and the Forestry Service can and should improve the way they manage federal funding and resources to protect wild horses and burros. There are better ways to help preserve these beautiful and wild animals than with the predominant usage of helicopter roundups. This practice is incredibly severe on the welfare of these animals and have proven to be deadly and inhumane year after year.

There is a better way. Respectfully, I would urge you to recommend to end the cycle of capturing and removing wild horses and burros from their natural habitats and shifting the focus to sustainable, non-invasive management solutions that allow these animals to live freely on the land that they have an inhabited for centuries. I was also disappointed to learn that less than 1% of the BLM annual budget for another year was spent on humane wild fertility control with the vast majority of its budget spent on feeding horses in holding and on these helicopter roundups. As part of improving humane management, the BLM should refocus its resources to implement humane fertility control programs on a larger scale to prioritize in the wild conservation efforts, including water and habitat restoration that promote long-term health for both animals and ecosystems. With nearly 66,000 wild horses in holding facilities, it's clear that a systematic change is needed.

And I would ask that you make this your top priority. The current processes are not only detrimental to the well-being of these animals, but they are also not sustainable at all for Americans who ultimately pay for their care while in holding, now more than $150 million a year. With the population this size and a price tag this big, there needs to be a radical overhaul to the current management practices. And I say that the time has come. It just doesn't make sense to me why we continue to round up the horses and burros to live the rest of their lives in captivity in corrals, some of which do not have any shelter from the direct elements. Thank you again for taking public comment today. I appreciate your time.

Jenny Lesieutye

Good afternoon. First off, I am giving my comment for the Coalition of Healthy Nevada Lands, wildlife and Free roaming wild horses and burro. I thank the Board and I thank the staff that this coalition 100% supports for what you're doing on the ground for these animals. The priority of the Coalition of Healthy Nevada Lands is protection of natural wildlife, native plants, pollinators, springs, riparian areas through a win-win management of these free roaming horses and burro. Overpopulation and excess horses and burro have and are destroying the forage and water sources that wildlife and they need to live on.

In Nevada, the dry state in the nation is currently 3 times over AML, of the 12,811 horses, we've now got over 38,000 on there. And that does not include another 6 to 10,000 that are tribal land, state-owned horses and horses that are roaming on Nevada lands from California. In 2019, the coalition supported the 2019 path forward that said if we gather 20,000 horses, we'll reach AML in 10 years. That's only happened once. That was in 2022, so we're way far behind. Last 5 years, Congress has appropriated over $644 million, and we no way have made much progress. In the 1971 Act, it states the secretary shall cause additional excess horses and burro for which adoption demand does not exist to be euthanized in the most humane fashion. We are now over 41,000 horses and pastures, 41 over the age of 10. That's about $38 million in one year. So let's follow the law, let's follow the act, and let's get this rolling with a real plan. Thank you.

Joel Blakeslee

Good afternoon, Madam Chairman, members of the committee. My name is Joel Blakeslee. I'm representing the coalition for Nevada's Wildlife and the Southern Nevada Coalition for Nevada's Wildlife. We're sportsman's organizations. We're very concerned about the overpopulation of horses on Nevada Rangelands.

We've watched our deer herds go from 250,000 in 1988 to less than 60,000 today. Horses aren't the only reason, but they're certainly a big part of it.

Our social media is blowing up, as hunters are seeing hundreds of horses every day and no deer. There's got to be a place for the animals that are supposed to be there. I have a suggestion that would be a good plan.

I don't have time to wait 10 years. I'm 70 years old. I bet most of the people in this room aren't going to be here in 10 years. Right now we have a new administration coming up, and they've indicated an interest in government waste and so on and so forth.

We have several Nevada counties that have declared a state of emergency for the Rangelands in their county due to wild horses, probably about half of the counties in the state. I don't have the number; I think it's 7 or 8.

If this Board, and I'm asking you if you would consider this, would draft a resolution declaring a state of emergency in the State of Nevada, I'll guarantee you that we'll get that in front of the next administration in Congress. Thank you.

Suzanne Roy

Okay. Hi everyone. I'm Suzanne Roy, Executive Director of American Wild Horse Conservation. The first time I attended one of these meetings was in 2009. And yes, I am having a Groundhog Day moment here, because literally the same issues that we're discussing today, prioritizing fertility control over spending all the money on roundups and holding were discussed back then.

When I joined AWHC in 2012, I knew the decades-long controversy over wild horse and burro management could not be solved by simply demanding change. We had to prove it was possible. We invested in fertility control in Nevada's Virginia Range. We created the largest wild horse fertility control program in the world.

In Utah's Cedar Mountains, we partnered with the BLM and a local ranching permittee to dart nearly 50 mares this year, proving that even the wildest herds can be darted. In the Pine Nut HMA, we're doing the same thing.

Over the past five years, AWHC has delivered more than 10,000 fertility-control treatments to wild mares. That's more than twice what the BLM accomplished in the same period. We've also embraced collaboration as a path forward, and we worked very hard to pass legislation in Colorado to create a working group to develop consensus humane solutions on and off the range. You're going to hear more from our team on some of these initiatives.

Today with over 66,000 wild horses and burros in holding facilities, it's incredible, but the roundups continue unabated. Right now, the BLM is rounding up horses in Fish Creek right now that we could have prevented from being born, had the BLM accepted our fully funded proposal for fertility control five years ago.

We urge this Board to be bold in its recommendation to prioritize fertility control once and for all. Because without it, you'll never reach AML, and you certainly will never stay at AML.

I also would request that you recommend that the BLM continue its grants program to non-profit organizations to do fertility control darting. Because that is a cost-effective way to get the program done. And I've been told that the grants will not be offered in the future. That would be an important recommendation. Thank you very much.

Tracy Wilson

Good afternoon. My name is Tracy Wilson, and I'm the Nevada State Director for American Wild Horse Conservation.

The BLM has stated that it needs to reduce wild horse populations to AML before fertility control will work. But the reality is that getting to AML and holding it is an unattainable goal with the agency's current plans. And it's costing taxpayers millions.

There are 45 HMAs at or below AML, not including those that have been recently gathered to within AML. How many of those have meaningful fertility control programs started?

Used when over AML, every birth prevented with fertility control is one less horse removed, which is one less horse at risk for entering the slaughter pipeline, or one less horse requiring taxpayer funding to be held in long-term holding for its lifetime. In FY24, BLM treated approximately 1,038 mares with fertility control at the cost of $5 million.

In calendar year 2024, we treated 1,202 individual mares for $355,000. On the Virginia range alone, we've seen a 72% decrease in foal births and population not just stabilized, but in decline. And through a collaborative grant program with BLM, AWHC, and a rancher, we are administering fertility control to mares in the Cedar Mountain HMA. The BLM grant program helps start fertility control programs, and we need those grants to continue.

The BLM can take measured steps to get off the treadmill and not do this forever by reallocating resources and flip the status quo from primarily helicopter roundup management to primarily fertility control management.

In conclusion, I ask the Board to recommend that the BLM take steps now to reform its current management program by significantly scaling up humane fertility control programs, and continue grants to nonprofits to continue the programs both new and already in place, even while in areas above AML. Thank you so much for your time.

Nicole Hayes

Hi everyone. My name is Nicole Hayes, and I'm a conservation scientist with American Wild Horse Conservation.

We were recently invited by the BLM to a discussion on fertility control methods, and they asked for our input and thoughts on each proposed methodology. We sincerely appreciate this collaborative step. And through this, we were able to explain our criteria for evaluating all these methodologies. And I wanted to share with the Board, since the BLM found them very helpful.

We're specifically looking for humane, effective, reversible, minimally disruptive, cost-effective, and scalable solutions. I think it's crucial to note that as the science stands now, there's no humane, effective, and scalable mare sterilization technique. The science that has been proven to work, has been proven to be humane, effective and scalable, is immunocontraception.

I want to stress that fertility control is scalable. The Virginia Range Program in Nevada has over 3,500 horses and over 300,000 acres and has a proven successful fertility control program and has resulted in population reductions.

The first four years of data from this program was peer-reviewed, published, and presented at the World Veterinary Association Congress last April. It's very simple mathematics. Every foal not born is one that does not need to be managed or potentially cared for in long-term holding for its entire life.

I ask the Board to recommend the BLM start fertility control programs at the 45 HMAs that are already at or below AML, and switch the focus to humane, effective, reversible, cost-effective and scalable solutions.

As someone so astutely put, we need to get off the treadmill. This solution does not require room at long-term holding facilities or an increased appetite for horse adoptions.

And I want to thank and recognize the Board for the time and the hard work you guys have put into this, and the vocal support for fertility control that's already been said. I think collaborative solutions are truly the way forward. Thank you guys so much.

Katherine Theus

Good afternoon. My name's Katherine Theus, and you might be sensing a theme. I'm also with American Wild Horse Conservation.

I'm here today to urge you to recommend substantial reforms to the BLM and Forest Service Wild Horse and Burro Programs. The current system is unsustainable, and costs both the taxpayers millions of dollars every year and the lives of these federally protected animals. There are better sustainable solutions.

First, we must stop the cruel and brutal cycle of roundups. These inhumane practices cause immense stress, injury, and often death to wild horses and burros. Instead, the focus should shift to sustainable non-invasive management solutions that allow these animals to live freely on the lands that they've inhabited for centuries.

Second, prioritize in-the-wild fertility control and habitat conservation. Implementing large-scale humane fertility control programs and protecting natural habitats are key steps towards sustainable management. AWHC has proven this is possible with our fertility control programs of wild horses out in the Virginia Range and Cedar Mountain.

Third, we must evaluate non-lethal solutions to address the growing population in holding facilities. Repatriating wild horses to herd areas capable of sustaining them is a viable solution that this Board should recommend. Many herd areas that have been zeroed out for wild horses remain open for extensive livestock grazing.

Fourth, abandon cash incentives in the AIP. Cash incentives funnel animals into slaughter auctions, putting them at extreme risk. Veterinary vouchers or non-cash support would ensure proper care without incentivizing exploitation.

Fifth, call for an independent investigation of the BLM's adoption and sale program. Transparency is critical to restore the lost public trust. An external agency should review current practices to ensure no animals end up in the slaughter pipeline.

Finally, until roundups are permanently halted, transparency and accountability are essential. I urge you to require cameras on roundup helicopters and wranglers. This measure will ensure contractor accountability, humane practices, and uphold the public's First Amendment right to observe government actions.

The path forward is clear: sustainable, humane, and cost-effective management that modernizes these management programs. I respectfully ask you to lead the change by recommending flipping the model and managing wild horses in the wild, not cruelly rounding them up and removing them. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Bonnie Kohleriter

Thank you. I'm Bonnie Kohleriter, and I have worked with the Devil's Garden horses from California. And the question, is there any validity to advocates' concerns regarding the use of GonaCon as suggested day one, day 30, and then again on year three or four?

As I understand, there's no research to date on this process. There's no long-term monitoring except now we have two years of monitoring on three herds. Is it Swasey, Eagle, and Sulfur? But not long-term. We have no comparison of morbidity-to-replacement rates.

This seems to be of importance, because if your morbidity rate exceeds your fertility rate, then you're looking toward slow but sure extubation.

And finally here, we don't know the long-term effects yet of the physical health and reproductive capability outcomes. But we do know that GonaCon affects the hormones and the pituitary glands, which also are responsible for many other functions in the species. And we know that it reduces progesterone. And we know also that ... I'm losing my train of thought here because I'm not reading.

Finally, here, I understand that GonaCon is being used in Devil's Garden on the stallions, as well as on the mares. And this to me, even though the GonaCon label says you are not to use it on stallions because it will sterilize them, and also the EA there says that you're not to be using GonaCon and you're not to be using it until you are within AML, it doesn't seem to matter.

And to inject mares at this time and stallions without longer-range study appears irresponsible to me and unscientific, and even bordering on criminal. If the BLM and Forest Service continues to use GonaCon day 1, day 30, and 3 or 4 years later, perhaps this action needs to be taken to a higher level.

Allison Hinkle

Good afternoon. My name is Allison Hinkle, and I'm the Virginia Range program manager and development coordinator for American Wild Horse Conservation.

Over the past three years, I've worked closely with our team to advocate for the humane treatment and protection of America's wild horses and burros. In the last year, I've taken on a direct role in AWHC's Roundup Documentation Program.

In 2024, our team observed 13 of 16 planned helicopter roundups, spending long days documenting how animals were treated under the Bureau of Land Management's Comprehensive Animal Welfare program, or CAWP standards. But time and time again, we have seen these standards fall short.

At the Blue Wing complex roundup, for example, the operation received a 99% CAWP assessment score. On paper, that sounds like a near-perfect operation.

In reality, one horse who had once roamed freely across the Blue Wing complex collapsed from exhaustion after being relentlessly pursued by a helicopter. Rather than receiving immediate care or compassion, that same horse was subjected to unnecessary cruelty and physical aggression by wranglers.

The inhumane treatment this horse faced rose to the level of a federal crime and serves as a glaring example of the disconnect between CAWP scores and the actual experiences of these animals. Further, there was no substantial corrective action taken against the perpetrators of this criminal act, and the roundup continued on, like nothing happened.

This highlights two major concerns. First, CAWP assessments need to reflect the reality on the ground, and contractors must be held accountable to these standards.

Second, contractors must be held criminally accountable for cruel and inhumane treatment of our wild horses and burros.

I urge the advisory Board to prioritize transparency, both in accurate CAWP reporting and in contractor conduct, and consequences in its recommendations for wild horse and burro management.

Public oversight isn't just important. It's essential for accountability in the management of our nation's wild horses and burros.

Thank you for your time and attention. I hope these concerns are met with the urgency they deserve. Thank you.

Colette Kaluza

Good afternoon, Colette Kaluza for Wild Horse Education. We have made recommendations to the Board and in just 48 hours, around 500 people have signed on.

The Board should recommend that BLM and Forest Service immediately create a designated task force to address the increase in shooting deaths of federally protected wild horses and burros.

The Board should recommend the Adoption Incentive Program be suspended. The BLM prioritize creating and updating herd management area plans. The BLM and Forest Service include facility reports as part of online gather updates. The BLM complete the process of formalizing welfare rules so they are enforceable. BLM created a draft, begin a review phase, and then simply said the draft was final and policy.

BLM took the first step toward creating a welfare policy by developing the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program in 2015. But BLM did not take the next step to achieve an enforceable welfare policy through the rulemaking process, which includes public comments on what is humane.

In 2021, BLM simply started calling their program policy without going through rulemaking, and did not make an enforceable welfare policy. BLM created the draft and began implementing it, but never did the review or invite public comments.

The public and independent experts were disallowed from addressing deficits, such as air quality and heat index that have been a part of veterinary standards and the equine world for over a decade yet absent from BLM's program.

BLM's welfare standards are so ambiguous or discretionary that what is humane has mostly been left up to BLM in charge of an operation. I have personally observed why their welfare program does not work, based on my hundreds of days observing wild horse and burro roundups. Thank you.

Virtual Comments

Rick Karcich

Well, thank you. I'm Rick Karchic from Centennial, Colorado. And for the record, I speak the following.

Our issue involves the fate of voiceless wild horses and burros in public lands throughout the American West. We know through long, painful experience that relief for these voiceless wild horses and burros has never voluntarily been given by

Big Ag, Big Oil, and BLM. Instead, wild horses and burros are scapegoated with big lies regarding overpopulation, while America's public lands are desecrated by livestock.

For years, advocates for wild horses and burros have acted in good faith as voices for wild horses and burros and supporting the common good for America's public lands. We have sought to achieve the best possible outcomes underpinned by decision-making that is ethically, morally, and scientifically sound.

For each wild horse population, the BLM sets AMLs, which the National Academy of Science has found they have no basis in science. Instead, the BLM sets AMLs arbitrarily, typically prioritizing the agency's preference to have domestic cattle and sheep trucked into wild-horse HMAs to compete with the horses.

Not much has been accomplished by the BLM in the years since the act was signed in 1971, except more deaths and cruel abuse of wild horses and burros, which is never recognized by BLM despite photographic proof captured by advocates.

BLM has added many more long-term holding facilities, and their budget has skyrocketed by millions of taxpayer dollars despite renowned failures and no oversight in Congress.

In the language of Project 2025, this year promises even more failures for wild horses and burros. BLM has doubled down on capture and removal, resulting in thousands more captured wild horses and burros living at filthy off-range corrals at ever-greater cost to taxpayers.

We believe it is important not to feed into the false narrative that there is an overpopulation of wild horses and burros, which therefore requires BLM to remove them from the range. This has only resulted in harm to wild horses and burros.

Livestock far outnumber the horses on public lands. Our public lands should not be used to subsidize the meat industry. And wild horses should not be removed because they are seen as competition for slaughter-bound livestock.

Saundra Holloway

My name is Saundra Holloway, and I'm calling in from Arizona. First, I'd like to thank the Board members for their work, and appreciate you considering my comments.

The Board should recommend that the BLM complete the process of formalizing welfare rules so that they are enforceable. The BLM created a draft, began a review, and then simply said the draft was final and then policy. The draft and review never went for public comment and then formalization as policy. Please recommend the BLM complete formalization of concise and enforceable welfare rules by putting out the standards for public comment and finalization.

The Board should recommend that the BLM and Forest Service include facility reports as part of online gather updates. The backlog in unanswered Freedom of Information Act requests has been unacceptable for many years.

The majority of FOIA requests that agencies receive have to do with disposition of horses and burros post-capture, listing which facilities receive animals on a daily basis, how many, vet reports and deaths reports during active operations out to three months would cut down the FOIA backlog, save considerable taxpayer funding and litigation involving the FOIA program.

The Board should recommend that the BLM and Forest Service immediately create a designated task force to address the increase in the shooting deaths of our federally protected wild horses and burros.

Additionally, the Board should recommend the Adoption Incentive Program be suspended immediately. Instead, recommend that BLM bring back the label of fostering an animal and provide a certificate that would allow the BLM to reclaim any horse or burro found in any kill lot.

The Board should recommend the BLM prioritize creating updating herd management area plans. The courts have clearly stated that removal and/or fertility control for population growth suppression is not management planning, nor are gathers. The Board should soundly reprimand BLM for decades of ignoring this foundational management document.

Prior to creating new gather assessments, the Board should recommend BLM craft herd management area plans to tier those gather assessments in order to create sound management decisions, which is a mandate of the law. Simply perpetuating removals that do not tier to actual management planning-

Heather Mills

Okay, great. Hi, my name is Heather Mills and this is my first time speaking about wild horses. I'm not affiliated with any groups. I'm just a horse-loving, concerned, taxpaying citizen who lives on the California-Nevada border.

I want to help from eyes on the ground, because as I start educating myself about the tens of thousands of horses in holding facilities within hours of where I live, I want to come up with tangible solutions that I think might work. Who knows? But I thought I would just give my opinion.

I visited the Fallon Broken Arrow Facility and the Palomino Valley Wild Horse and Burro Corrals. I also have been educating myself about the prison program in the Northern Nevada Correctional Facility for the mustangs. My idea is that if we can train more of these mustangs in the holding corrals, we'll have a better chance of adopting them out.

I think the Northern Nevada Correctional Facility only adopts out 70 to 80 per year. I think that this program has been proven success over and over again. And I think if we do more of those mustang training programs, we will have more successful adoptions.

I also feel that keeping the wild horses on their ranges is better than taking them off, and then having to deal 68,000 horses in holding facilities. If we can use the fertility treatments, and bait and trap versus the roundups, I think that would help tremendously. Thank you for your time.

Debra Clemente

Okay. On January 2nd, I received a letter from Cory Booker. And I would like to read it to you all, seeing you are talking about budgets. Thank you very much.

It says, "Dear Ms. Clemente, thank you for taking the time to write to me about protecting wild horses and burros. I rely on the input of engaged New Jerseyans like you when making decisions. I appreciate your sharing your thoughts.

"Wild horses and burros are an important part of the natural legacy, and as such, are federally protected under the Wild and Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. However, wild horses are often subject to controversial and outdated population management practices by the Bureau of Land Management.

"I strongly oppose the cruel surgical sterilization of wild horses and have called for the defunding of that practice. Further, the BLM's current model of continuously removing wild horses from the range and shifting them into short- and long-term holding is costly and unsustainable.

"I support keeping wild horses and burros on the range through the safe use and proven fertility control options such as reversible and immuno-contraceptive vaccines. In the fiscal year 2024, I led a successful effort to secure up to a million dollars in funding for the use of the immuno-contraceptive vaccines for humane fertility control.

"Additionally, I oppose any measures to allow for or result in the slaughter of horses for consumption. I support the Bipartisan Save America's Equines Act and would prohibit the knowing sale or transportation of horses for consumption in the United States.

"I have consistently supported language in the annual spending bills to prohibit the slaughter of horses for humane consumption. Further, I have pushed for the protections within the Wild Horse and Burro Program's Adoption Incentive Program to prevent animals from being sold to slaughter after adoption. I-"

Craig Downer

All right. Yes. My name is Craig C. Downer. I'm a wildlife ecologist, and I'm with the Wild Horse and Burro Fund in Minden, Nevada.

I'm very concerned about how the wild horse and burros are being treated like domesticated animals, and that the program is being largely run by people with a ranching background. Actually, the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burros Act was meant to defend these wild horse and burros against people who, because of their vested interests, were trying to largely eliminate or minimize these horses.

You know that mature social structures actually help greatly limit the horse and burro populations. And if you would practice what's called reserve design with natural barriers, and letting mature social units evolve, you would have natural self-stabilization since the older horses and burros naturally limit this. They also educate the younger members in how to survive in the area.

So it seems like the BLM and the Forest Service in their wild horse and burro programs are actually creating a domesticated so-called Wild Horse and Burro Program. This is really contrary to the true intent and spirit of the act, and contrary to the general public's wishes on this wonderful quality-of-life issue.

And please pay close attention to the three-page input I gave you. I'm very upset about this, what's evolved. And I think we need people that are much more respectful of the true nature of the burros and horses as species in the natural world, and the nature of nature itself. I greatly appreciate your letting me speak. Thank you. Bye.

Mary Koncel

Hi, my name is Mary Koncel. I'm directing my comments to the Forest Service and ask that it withdraw the proposed management plan for the Devil's Garden wild horse territory and replace it with one that prioritizes humane and sustainable alternatives. This current plan is a thinly disguised extinction plan dictated by local livestock interests. For example, according to its 990s, between 2020 and 2023 the Modoc Farm Bureau, an ongoing partner with the Modoc National Forest, paid almost $2 million to, one, hire retired federal employees to record data on the impacts of wild horses on land allotments. And two, assist the Department of Agriculture to maintain the wild horse population on Devil's Garden. Given the Bureau's contempt for wild horses and its goal to maintain cheap grazing on public lands, this partnership represents a blatant conflict of interest. And because of the biased source of its data, amounts to nothing more than junk science.

Then there's the Forest Service's 2021 Sweetheart Settlement with the Devil's Garden Preservation Group, an alliance of local ranchers. Among other things, it mandates the removal of almost 500 horses a year until the unscientifically low AML is reached. More removals in the use of the sterile and GonaCon will continue in the management plan, placing what was once California's largest wild horse herd in peril. Of the 53 wild horse in borough territories managed by the

Forest Service, 19 are inactive, with many still allowing livestock grazing. The proposed management plan is likely to result in Devil's Garden becoming the next. Chasing Horses Wild Horse Advocates is petitioning Governor Newsom and California legislators to intervene on behalf of the Devil's Garden herd. Please visit its website and add your names. Thank you.

Diane Delano

Hello, this is Diane Delano from Wild Horse Rescue Center. I'm located in Florida, so way over on the East Coast. I've been involved for 34 years with wild horses, and I became a non-profit organization to help with wild horses that become in captivity. Over the years, it was wonderful at first when I got into the program, the horses came right from the range. You would get them at six weeks off the range. You also got a gilding voucher, which then you could castrate your stallion for the gilding voucher. I've seen a lot of changes, and it's not always in the positive. One of the great things that was part of the wild horse program was wild horse workshops. From 2000-2005, the Bureau of Land Management and Least Resistance Training Concepts worked together on these amazing workshops that people came from all over the United States, nonprofits, organizations, wild horse people, trainers, and we came together on good, genuine methods. I would love to see something like that come back.

The 2004 Senator Burns bill is horrible to take horses off the range over the age of 10. The horses do need to have the older horses there, just like Craig Downer spoke about. You need the wisdom. It would be like coming in and taking all the old people from a city and letting just the young people run everything. Also, if the mares could keep their foals with them and not take the foals, they would not be so quick to want to have a new foal. Also, by mixing the stallions up. On those massive roundups, you are putting bachelor stallions that would never have mares in with mares because you've ruined the herd structure. Marian Simmons did a lot of studies on horses, how they are in the wild, so please study the species. Get rid of the incentive program immediately, it's a horrible program. They come into my rescue afterwards.

Cherice Arthur

Okay. I've been able to unmute. Hi, my name is Cherice Arthur, I am an advocate for the American Wild Horse Conservation, and I live in Oregon. As stewards of the earth, humans have a responsibility to protect and preserve species that share the planet with us. Wild horses are a part of our natural heritage, and their survival is tied to the health of our land, allowing them to continue to live as they have for generations as part of ensuring that future generations can also experience the magic of our wild horses and burros. Our wild horses and burros ignite a sense of wonder and connection to all of those who encounter them. They present the beauty of the natural world, encouraging respect for wildlife and the need to protect the wildness. Saving them allows future generations to experience their magic, helping them to foster a deep stewardship for their environment.

And I just wanted to remind the Board that in September of '59, so it's been over 65 years, President Eisenhower signed the first bill making it illegal for planes to flush wild horses out of the wild, as well as Jeeps doing the same thing. And there were no fences in the first actual refuge in Nevada back in 1962, the horses and the burros shared the land with deer, antelope, and big horn sheep. What I would like to see the BLM do, this is my dream for 2025, that we can all work together and collaborate as human beings, because what we're doing to our wild horses and burros is tragic. It really is.

And I think as human beings we can do a better job. We need to let nature take its course. We need to get rid of the incentive programs, like the other speaker said. Every day I get feeds that I follow of horses that are starving and are just humanely not being taken care of, to be sold and sent to Canada and Mexico to be slaughtered. We as human beings can do a lot better. And I respect your service on this Board, and I hope that you can help make changes. Thank you so much.

Sydne Solley

Thank you for letting me speak to you today. I am in South Carolina, have never seen a wild horse on the range or been to a kill pin, or been to a holding facility. But I've watched on the media what has happened with these horses being rounded

up with helicopters and trapped in these cages and hauled off in these trailers when they are animals that are parts of families. And like the others said, what we're doing to these horses is nothing short of tragic abuse. They end up in kill pins, they languish away and die in your holding facilities that we taxpayers pay for. The amount of money that is spent rounding them up is ridiculous. The infertility programs should be brought forward. We should stop separating families. We should stop rounding up with helicopters. And we should take care and mindful of what God's created us to enjoy on this earth and not try and let money and the evil take over.

I'm not very scientific about it, but I'm just one person who thinks that what the government's doing with our wild horses and burros is a travesty against nature, and it should stop immediately. And the incentive program of people getting $1,000 for a wild horse is ridiculous. Just as the others have said, I see them time and time again in kill pens that they're starved to death. Or they may not even make it to kill pens, they just starve to death in somebody's yard. I don't know about you, but my taxpayer dollars should be spent more wisely than $186 million a year for holding horses or each roundup costing that much. I thank you for your time. Sorry I didn't have it written down, but that's how I feel.

Linda Greaves

I'm Linda Greaves from DC, and I'm here to share a few key recommendations developed by the Wild Horse and Burro Advocates, citizens and experts at the 2024 Wild Horse Conference. This document has been submitted to this panel and delivered to the director of BLM in Washington DC during our meeting this summer. Today, I'll highlight some points and ask that you recommend the following. Initiate HMAPs immediately as mandated by existing Federal Code of Regulations. Most are in a 40-year delay. Enforce an adherence to the HMAPs where they are and as they roll out. Revise outdated AMLs using modern science. Update the COP to be an enforceable regulation with public input and current, well, equine standards. Require wind and rain shelters in all holding facilities. BLM requires them of adopters to not have them as abuse.

Ensure qualified staff are available at holding before rounding up horses. If not, the roundup needs to be canceled. I have seen holding facilities with almost no staff trying to deal with this influx of horses. Ban sterilization, sex ratio skewing, and unproven methods like GonaCon, which harm the natural behaviors of herd health. And this issue has been covered on birth control, so I'm not going to go into it. Reassess HAs for repopulation, implement rewilding projects that could be done with university or non-profits working on rewilding. And this would help reduce the horses in holding.

Prioritize removing cattle over horses per the existing Code of Federal Regulations. Create a public portal for real-time data and operations to cover vet reports and holding during and after roundups. Clear the FOIA backlogs. Ensure meaningful public access at viewing at roundups' shipping and holding in popular lands. This can be written into the recommendations. Install cameras on helicopters. Also, before, during, and after mining operations water and land needs to be monitored and addressed by the mining companies. Thank you.

Natalie Kniess

Thank you very much. Good afternoon. I'm Natalie Kniess, a tax paying citizen and a member of the media. Today I want to address something that strikes at the core of public trust, accountability. I recognize the important role of the advisory Board for the Bureau of Land Management and how it shapes policies that affect our public lands. I imagine it must be troubling for you as it is for the public to know that for 38 years the Bureau has been in violation of code 4710.3-1, by not creating herd management area plans for the majority of the management areas. Instead, the Bureau produced a 33-page HMAP memorandum to Congress that left out critical scientific data, including plans for preserving habitat, protecting wild horses and burros, and mitigating industrial use like oil, gas, mining, and livestock. That was basically kicking the can.

Rather than addressing areas individually as required, the Bureau issued a broad analysis that failed to meet the specific needs of each management area. Whether this stems from incompetence or insubordination, the result is the same, trust in the system erodes. The very agencies tasked with protecting these lands and animals cannot afford to sidestep the

responsibilities, and especially for 38 years. The public's eyes are on this issue. Millions of Americans are watching closely through video, social media, and public forums. Awareness is growing, and the demand for accountability is louder than ever. This will not fade into the background. The kicking of the can, that era is over. It is imperative that the Bureau acts scientifically in accordance with the law, because continued neglect risks more than just legal consequences, it deepens public distrust in government as a whole. It erodes public trust, and that's what's happening here. Thank you.

Toni Napolitano

Shaking her head. I live... Okay. All right. My name is Toni Napolitano, I live in Colorado. Of course, passionate about our wild horses. I'm on the ground as an observer at helicopter roundups, and I've tried to work cooperatively, collaboratively with the BLM here in Colorado. My first recommendation, and I was actually a little bit shocked at what you guys talked about a little bit earlier this morning, is that I think a big priority needs to be fertility control programs across the western states. And I'm shocked that their goal is only to participate in doing 1,200 horses this year. I think we need to push this up front and spend most of our money on this, and use fertility measures that are reversible like PZP. And actually, to be honest, stop wasting money on saying, "Let's look at all experimental drugs, IUDs," all these kinds of things. We know PZP seems to work, seems to be the safest. And let's just go with that.

I have spent a lot of time talking to Paul Griffith, who's probably still in the room, your fertility specialist. And he says GonaCon is not good. If the goal of the BLM is to sterilize these animals, then use that. And that's your own BLM specialist. The other thing is in Colorado, our BLM people are saying they're not going to start a fertility program significantly until they get down to AML. This is low-level AML. This is not right, we should start doing it now while you're rounding up.

Number two, I'd like us to stop the helicopter roundups, but at least put cameras on these helicopters. Next, the incentive program. The adoptive incentive program really needs to change, not cash vouchers, maybe non-cash vouchers for veterinary services. One of your members, Susan said she's amazed of how many horses end up in the kill pen. I just called one a few minutes ago, they have a Mustang in the kill pen, which I'll be working on seeing what we can do about that. The Mustangs are ending up in the slaughter pop line. And the other thing we need-

Andrea Lonseth

This is Andrea Lonseth. These horses are going to a brutal slaughter where a huge cement block comes down on them time and time again until they're finally dead. Does that hurt? I want you to stop the adoption incentive program, because vouchers are fine. $1,000 is my money that I earned through blood, sweat, and tears trying to work. Please don't do that anymore. You need to have the cameras on not just the helicopters, but at the roundup pens. I've only seen the stuff through photographic evidence. Couture's the other contractor, Warner, they are sacred monsters because photographic evidence, on film rather. I saw the BLM employees say that we have no control over the behavior of the contractors. Then they left the back of the loading truck wide open and 19 of them fell out. They barely walked on three legs, but they were pronounced okay.

And in July 13, '24, Palomino that was so loved by the public, Sunshine, was run into some fences and therefore broke his leg and he was shot to death, but not before chasing him for 45 minutes at the gallop in 104 degrees. There was 1 burro that they couldn't round up by helicopters. By the way, gather means, like my religion, in a friend's meeting house we gather. You don't gather. The wrangler's got a new fresh horse over and over four or five times to chase that one little burro for two hours straight galloping at full speed for his life. That is my taxpayer dollars you wasted on those 2 hours going after that. Only family matters to the horse, and the PZP does cause terrible hormone upset, we know that from a female human being. And it does disturb the pituitary gland and it-

Catherine Ryals

Good afternoon. I am long time Nevada resident and taxpayer. Roundups are cruel, inhumane, abusive, and the wild horses and burros have to endure a great deal of mistreatment from all individuals involved during these roundups. Examples of some of the abuse the wild horses and burros experienced during roundup, bulls have been out of trail, because they aren't latched correctly. Wild horses have been roped, kicked and mistreated. If you haven't been to a roundup or if you are unfamiliar with the roundups, I would recommend you research video footage and photographs of what the wild horses and burros have to endure.

Let's take a look at some facts. Wild horses and burros are being scapegoated for the failing rangelands. Nevada has had many wildfires, severe drought, and illegal livestock trespass that is still continuing to go on to this day. Livestock outnumber wild horses and burros on public lands 125 to one. Ranchers denied the drought while collecting government subsidies. Ranchers were permitted to allow their livestock to graze on public lands during the drought after it was closed by the BLM. Many ranchers in Nevada are making money from their roundups, have their livestock on public lands, and is growing hay and/or alfalfa on their property.

Think about this, making money off of the horse's backs, grazing privately owned cattle on public lands, and growing crops on their ranches. Would this be called triple dipping? Sure isn't double dipping. The Code of Federal Regulations 43 CFR, subpart 470-6 states that wild horses and burros shall be considered comparably with other resource values in the formulation of land use plans. Do you think the wild horses and burros are considered comparable to livestock? In my opinion, no, they aren't. They continue to be a scapegoat. The wild horses and burros continue to lose their designated habitat while the livestock continue to destroy public lands. Thank you.

Mr. Kuechle: With that, that closes out our comment period. We'll move on to the next agenda item. What we needed to do was pick up where we left off with a Forest Service presentation and any questions or discussion that the Board would like to have with them.

Ms. Carlisle: I just want to comment, the Board Chair does reserve the right to comment on accuracies of public comments. I don't want this to come across as we're not listening to you at all. We're listening very hard. And my hand hurts from taking notes, because we do want to think about the things that people are seeing of concern. Just a personal plea, when we're talking about things that we've witnessed maybe online, we should be really careful about where that information is coming from and how we're talking about it. The things that we say in these meetings matter. The trickle-down effect to agency personnel actually occurs. Death threats, all kinds of emails. If we can back off on that tone, it's really helpful for the forward progression we're making with the majority of the organizations and public commenters that participate in these meetings. We want to keep that going.

And secondly, especially if you're commenting about a conversation you've had with agency personnel... I sound really scoldy, I'm really sorry. If you're talking about a conversation you've had with agency personnel and information you've gleaned from them, be careful about putting words into their mouth. They are not in a position to be able to respond to that during this meeting. It's just, again, a personal plea that we all do our best in communicating about these things. And the better that we communicate about these things, the more easily the Board and agency personnel can hear these concerns and really think about how we're going to respond to them. Thank you.

And again, I am aware that making public comment is not comfortable for everybody online or in person, so I appreciate that you all come, you show up, you have things to say that are important and valid. Thank you very much.

Ms. Carlisle: And I'll go ahead and turn back to our presentation from Forest Service. And if we can look back through our notes, we have to reverse direction at this point and look at our US Forest Service update. And if we have any comments or things to talk with Dr. Drotar about, now is the time.

And I would like to ask about your 95 to 100% placement rates for adoptions through Forest Service. What's your magical approach?

Dr. Drotar, DVM: It's not my approach. The people on the ground, the two women that you saw earlier today, and then the people that we've had in New Mexico, they're the magic. And one of the things that I do think is great that Charlie mentioned was the older horse outreach to show that they can be trained. I think that's huge. Because we all assume that anything over five, definitely over 10 is just thrown out because they're too set in their ways. And they're trying to disprove that. And they've also had some relationships, developed some relationships with some more sanctuary types of people that will take older mares for a while. And so it's developing those relationships of people that appreciate some of the older horses. But it's not my doing, it's their doing. And they've done a wonderful job of developing those relationships.

Ms. Carlisle: Oh, sorry. I had another question, but I have to look back through my notes. Give me a second. Anybody else in the meantime? What about folks online? I'm not able to-

Ms. Carlisle: Okay, go ahead, Commissioner Pearson.

Commissioner Pearson: I do want to commend you and thank you on the gathered on the North Hills. This has been a long time coming and it was really a... I know it was an emergency gather. But the people that I know, it is a Utah gather, it's not my county but it's in my area. And I heard several pleas for a few years. And like you said originally, a lot of the issue was that Forest Service doesn't have their own funding to be able to do that, and they have to depend on BLM or somebody else to come and take care of that. Yeah, they were really worried about deaths because of the drought and all of that, and it was a sad mess. Thank you for taking care of that.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: Well, and sometimes when it gets elevated the regions will find money. The problem is that we don't have designated funds for wild horse and burro. But just like that one was one, but both of the emergency gathers, the regions can find money if it's absolutely necessary. In some ways it's not a bad thing. But yes, I appreciate that.

Ms. Pearson: Might be the only way.

Mr. Kuechle: I think Ms. McAlpine has her hand up.

Ms. Carlisle: Go for it, Ms. McAlpine.

Ms. McAlpine: I have a hard time finding the audio button every once in a while. I'd like to ask for a definition of unauthorized horses.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: Well, as you know, the Free Roaming Wild Horse and Burro Act was that there were designated areas where horses existed at the time of its founding. Any animal that is not within that area or originated from that area is unauthorized livestock. And one of the reasons that Region Three deals with it so much is because their proximity to Mexico, their proximity to a lot of Native lands. And another big one, believe it or not, is unauthorized, unregulated racing. You have people that turn animals loose that are poor or whatever. Or, in one case a bunch of animals, after a fire, destroyed all the fences came from the tribal lands.

They're in areas that were not designated as territories in 1971. And so, animals that are not the offspring of the animals that were there at the time are unauthorized livestock. And so, unauthorized livestock, the laws are different, and they do not belong on the land. They're still treated humanely. These animals were put into holding and fed and treated humanely, however they can be sold and other things that you cannot do with a wild horse. But that's the difference, is that they originate from areas that were not designated as territories.

Ms. McAlpine: Okay. So just to reconfirm that these unauthorized horses are treated humanely when you remove them from the herd. And my comment to that, or my reaction to that, is that individuals who knowingly drop off their animals into authorized HMAs are not doing the herds any favors. They are increasing costs; they are taking space that's designated for wild horses and/or burros and resources away from them.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: They're breaking the law.

Ms. McAlpine: Good, thank you.

Ms. Carlisle: I was trying to find where you mentioned this. You talked a little bit about the loss of staffing at the Bloomfield Holding facility, which is small, but a very active facility with a small number of horses that get a lot of hands-on from the prior staff that is no longer there. So then the loss of that one staff member from moving on to a different place and tragically a second staff member who was hired and then killed in an automobile accident, I believe.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: No.

Ms. Carlisle: No?

Dr. Drotar, DVM: No. It's more tragic than that. I'll tell you in private.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. There was tragic loss of people that were working there, right as there was sort of a reinvigorated hiring pause, it's not quite a hiring freeze. So here sits this functional facility near a collaborative working group in New Mexico that has nobody there, so it's not usable. I'm confused about how to try to get support for staffing that facility. It seems such an epic waste of resources that there it sits and nothing can be done.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: I agree with you, and it's tragic that it is there and that we have no money to hire people forest service wide. This is more than just our program. The Forest Service, the funds for paying those of us that work for them are depleted because they over hired thinking that more people would retire. Some of us can't afford to retire, so we're still here or not interested in. It is wider than just our program. It is within the Forest Service itself. However, there are moves to get detailers in there, but it's difficult because as many of these places are, they're not in the middle of where a lot of people live. They're in out-of-the-way places as is this Bloomfield. It's not a big place, you're an hour away from any sizable town. So it's not easy.

And also, another issue within the conservation agencies is people with horse knowledge. People that go into the conservation agencies, often that's not what they're selected for. Finding detailers within the Forest Service to do it that are qualified and able is not easy. What could you do? Well put pressure on the regional forester, maybe sooner than later they would realize it's important enough that this should be exempted and we should fill a position. But again, it's a Forest Service wide problem. So yeah, I don't have a great answer for you.

Ms. Carlisle: Is there some sort of analysis of the, by not filling this position, the additional costs that it would be to the agency because of a lack of cohesion in that collaborative working group that exists?

Dr. Drotar, DVM: The collaborative seems to be doing pretty well. This was a major concern for me, and so I was actually invited. I've been invited to more than one of their meetings, and the collaborative is pretty solid. But yes, it is a

concern and particularly because there are people that are willing to do darting and people that are willing to do trapping and this other stuff, but they need to be recompensated for their efforts. And there isn't a channel to do that at this time because there's nobody at the corrals to handle the animals. Exact figures, I do know somebody, the budget person probably could get those, but I don't have it available and probably can't get it during this meeting.

Mr. Kuechle: Ms. McAlpine, you have your hand up. I don't know if that was from before or if you had a new question.

Ms. McAlpine: No, I have a new question. Theresa, as you were discussing this, the thought came up in my mind is would it be at all possible that this facility could be leased to BLM or an advocacy group similar to the one that you're currently working with that it doesn't sit idle and yet is utilized?

Dr. Drotar, DVM: It sits on BLM land. That's a good question I don't have an answer for. It's a good thought and I don't know. It'd be something we'd have to inquire about. I don't know. I don't know what the answer would be, but it's worth looking in. It's worth an inquiry and I'll ask.

Ms. McAlpine: Yeah, because if you're getting some lease money for it, you could hire the appropriate staff, even if it's minimal, and then have your volunteer group again working within that system.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: Well yeah, potentially there's a capacity for 125 horses. The problem is that of course that takes staffing and then you have to have somebody there, that's another aspect of it, is somebody to do placements of those animals, which we don't. That was a big function of the people there. But I'll certainly place those answers when I get home.

Ms. McAlpine: Good, thank you. Just a thought.

Dr. Drotar, DVM: That's a good one.

Ms. Carlisle: And Bryant, looking at our time, do we want to try to do session 4 or is there time for that?

Mr. Kuechle: We do want to do session 4. Well, we do need to take a short break regardless because we need to change over the Zoom from the public comment. Zoom to the general session. If we want to do a comeback at 2:45, take a short break, we could then kind of forgo the next break and be able to truck forward. Okay, let's do that. Let's do a short break. We'll come back at 2:45. So just like 7 minutes, 8 minutes.

Wild Horse and Burro Public Dashboard Demonstration Update

Meredith Kueck, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist for Headquarters office

Ms. Kueck: Good afternoon, everyone, I'm Meredith Kueck. I'm a Wild Horse and Burro Specialist for the headquarters office. And like Bryant said, today I'll be demoing our upcoming public-facing reporting dashboard. So, the purpose of this dashboard is to ideally reduce our FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] workload for our program as well as our number of data requests that we receive, improve program transparency, and then also make it easier for adopters to locate information on their horse or burro. So today what I will be showing you is a test dashboard. So, it's not real data, it's all test. It does look fairly real, but it's not, just to put that out there going forward. So, this is what the dashboard will look like. As you can see, there's already several other programs that are already utilizing this application. Our reports will be located here under Wild Horse and Burro Program System. We're hoping to launch this dashboard initially with five reports. And do I need to make that a little bit bigger? It looks like it's probably very small. Okay. Let me see what I can do.

Is that a little bit better? Okay, sounds good. If y'all have any questions throughout this, just feel free to ask me at any point in time, or if you need me to make anything any bigger, just let me know. Like I was saying, we're hoping to launch this dashboard initially with five reports, and these reports are based off of information that we do frequently receive

FOIA requests for. So, like I said, we really want to make that information more readily available for the public as well as decrease our FOIA workload.

The first report that I'm going to show you all is this Gathered Animals Report. When you first open up the page, we have this purpose section. Like I said, this is still test data. We're still working on some of this information. This purpose section will have just general information about the report and what sort of results someone can expect to get if they run this report. Below that, we have our report filters. So here we have capture herd place and capture date since we're wanting to look at gathered animals. So today I'll say that we are interested in the Black Mountain Herd management area, so we select that. And then we also want to look at specifically animals that were gathered in calendar year 2023. So here you can either type in your date or we have the calendar icon. I like just to type it in, it's a little bit faster. We'll say 1/1/23 to 1/1/24. Say okay.

And then here we get our report results. Do you all want me to make it a little bit bigger? I don't know if you can read that at all. If you can make it bigger? Okay. It's probably not going to look great, but hopefully it'll be a little bit easier to read. what you have here are your report results. We have basic information about the animals that are gathered. Freeze mark, chip number, the current disposition of the animals and species, gender and age information. Then if we scroll over, we have our capture date, capture age, where the animals were captured from. Obviously, these since we filtered for Black Mountain, they're all Black Mountain, whether they were captured inside or outside of the HMA. And then if any of these animals were released, they would have a release date and released hard place on here so you could see when they were released and where they were released to. We've also pulled in the first facility location name. This is something we get asked for quite a bit is where do the animals first go to after they're gathered? And then if the animals have any death information, that will all show up here.

You can see as we scroll down, there were a lot of burros gathered from Black Mountain in 2023 in our test data. We'll scroll down. If you go all the way to the bottom of this report, you can see there are more rows. It just shows 100. You can continue to add more rows here, or if someone wanted to export their report and save it in Excel or PDF, they do have that option here. Once they do that, I did that before so y'all would be able to see it. Whoops. Oh, man. This is basically, sorry, I'm struggling with making it bigger, your results just in the Excel format and then people can sort their data here or filter if they wanted to. Let's see. Sorry, I have the zoom bar up here on the top of my screen, so I can't make it bigger for y'all.

Oh, perfect. Thank you. I should have thought of that. There we go. Appreciate y'all. So yeah, here it's just all of our report data, looks like it did in the report on the web application. One thing I did want to show is all the way down here at the bottom that we couldn't see before because it was just showing the first 100 rows, we do have burros that were released or died. So here's that information down here at the end that you can see. So that's the first report that I wanted to go over with y'all. Do you have any questions on that one?

Dr. King, Ph.D.: Yeah, this looks really great.

Ms. McAlpine: Is that actual data you were using.

Ms. Kueck: It's not. Honestly, I'm pretty sure it's a copy of our actual data, but it's possible that people have done testing or training exercises with this data. So, it's probably not 100% accurate.

Ms. McAlpine: Okay. Could be manipulated. Okay.

Ms. Kueck: Yes.

Ms. McAlpine: Thank you.

Ms. Kueck: Yeah.

Dr. King, Ph.D.: Yeah. I like how comprehensive all of the data seems to be. You said it shows the first facility that they were at. Does it show the time at that facility, or does it give dates where animals were in different places?

Ms. Kueck: Not in this report. So, one thing when I was making these reports that I had to work through was they start to look kind of ugly just because of the amount of data that we have if you pull into much information in one report. So that's part of the reason I do have those five reports. So, the one that I'll show you next does have that location information in it.

Dr. King, Ph.D.: Great, thank you.

Ms. Kueck: Yeah. Okay, go ahead and go on to our next report then, which is this animal history by freeze mark report. Hopefully it'll load. There we go. Again, we don't have the purpose section completed yet. And this report, our only filter is the freeze mark temp ID. Something I would like to do before this goes to the public is basically create this report also with microchip. In case someone can't read the freeze mark, they'd still be able to look their animal up by their microchip.

We have the same button option as we did before, but it is limited to a certain number of freeze marks. So for this one, we'd use our advanced search option. Here you can see you can bump freeze marks back and forth depending on what you're looking for. You have the option to search up here, or let's say you were interested in those animals that we were just looking at from Black Mountain. We also have this edit button where you can go in and copy and paste freeze marks in here. If you have a whole bunch that you're wanting to look at-

Mr. Kuechle: Dr. Lenz has a question.

Ms. Kueck: Oh, okay.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Yeah. You know, I'm looking at your use of microchips and freeze branding, which is great. But the cattle industry, domestic cattle industry is pretty well advanced in the use of facial recognition in cattle. Have you all looked into that at all for the application of horses, especially horses on the range that people are applying fertility control and using markings to designate the horses? Have you looked into facial recognition at all?

Ms. Kueck: Not to my knowledge. Paul, do you know if we've...

Ms. Kueck: Did I hear him correctly? Is he saying facial recognition? Facial recognition? No, that's not something we employ.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Well, I'm sure you aren't, but I'm saying it might be a good idea to look at that in the future. Because I know when you're using fertility control in the range and you're not capturing the animals, a lot of times you're relying on markings to identify the horses for boosters or annual vaccination. But I'm wondering if it wouldn't be a good idea to check into that because it's very successful. It works really well in identifying individual animals. You don't have to capture the animal. You can just scan it from a distance and identify it and it's very accurate.

Ms. Kueck: Man, I hadn't heard about that before. That sounds very impressive.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Yep, I think it is. That could be something to look into.

Ms. Kueck: Okay, thank you. For this report then, for copy and paste, what I did is in advance, I went ahead and selected some freeze marks to show you all you could see just some different animals with different dispositions and then what that looks like in the report. There we go. You can just copy and paste in there, super easy. Say okay, they show up in our selected box here, say okay again, and then okay one more time. And then we get our report results. Make this a little bit bigger again. So, this report does have a bunch of information in it, I split it up into different sections so it's a little bit

easier to see what all is going on with each animal. This first section that we have is our capture and current location information. You can see each one of our freeze marks here, chip number if they have one.

Some of these animals were gathered a long time ago, they won't have chip numbers. We have our disposition and then current location information, which includes a name for animals that are in our facilities, or if they were at a temporary adoption event facility, the name of that facility would show up there as well. For animals that are either an adopter care and not titled, or in our facilities or maybe in foster care, they will show up with a city and state for the location for those animals. Anything that's titled sold or direct transfer, essentially privately owned, the city and state won't show up there. That's because of previous FOIA guidance where we were told that the privacy interest in that information outweighs the public interest after those animals are no longer federal property.

So that's what a lot of this is based on, making sure we don't release any PII, and then going off of previous FOIA guidance for what we would typically release. Beyond that, if the animal was born in a facility rather than captured. We have the birth location, birth date, herd place of origin if that animal has one for horses born in facilities. And then after that we have capture information, release information, and then that first BLM location name again. This second horse here has been captured and released twice, you can see both capture and release information on there.

That's our first section that we have. After that is adoption and compliance information. On these, if the fields are null, it just means that the animal doesn't have any relevant information in that field, hasn't been adopted. We have our PMACA information, adoption information, if the animal was part of the adoption incentive program, adoption outcome and date. And then at the end here, we also have inspection information as well as reason violation. And then this horse you can see after the inspection was relinquished back to the BLM. Below that, we have sale information, there's only one on here that was sold. You can see that in this line here. Just sale information, price and then where the animal was sold from, and then the sale adoption event name, if it was from an adoption event.

Following that, we have our training information. Again, just one animal in here went through a training program. This training type, if it's entered, will be something like saddle trained, halter trained, just the level of training that horse or burro has. And then training outcome, excuse me, at the end, which could be that it was adopted, transferred to another trainer, went back to a BLM facility, just whatever the outcome of that training was.

Next, we have direct transfer. This horse down here was transferred to the national forest. Again, transfer type office. And then here we have the location history, kind of what you were asking about. This first horse you can see was it Burns from 4/42000 until July 20th, 2000. And then you scroll over a little bit more, you can see that's BLM custody down here at the end. And then on July 20th, you can see was adopted and then has been at that location since that date. Just provides a full location history for every animal. You can see some of them go a lot more places than others. This one, Whoops. Computer's not cooperating with me. Went through several different facilities.

We have facility names or location names for everything except for private care facilities. That's because typically those are individuals' names, those are hidden. Whoops. Oh man, that's not what I wanted to happen. Sorry. Try to get back in there real quick. I think the only thing after that was deaths. Do y'all have any questions while I'm working on this? Sorry. Okay.

Commissioner Higbee: I have a question.

Ms. Kueck: Okay.

Commissioner Higbee: Are the livestock auctions required to, if one of these horses come through with a freeze brand on them or a chip, are they required to report them?

Ms. Kueck: They are supposed to contact one of our offices, yes, and find out if that horse is titled still adopted, essentially if it's BLM property.

Commissioner Higbee: Okay.

Ms. Kueck: This would be something that ideally they could look that information up here as well. So yeah. The last thing on here-

Commissioner Higbee: Is this public information. In other words, just as me as a layman, could I go to find this on your website somewhere?

Ms. Kueck: Not currently, that's the goal. This is still the test data. We have a little bit more testing to do on some of these reports and then also building out those report descriptions. Just a little bit more work, but we're getting close. Yeah, that's the goal here is that all of this information would be out there for the public on this dashboard, they would be able to look it up.

Commissioner Higbee: Now, people that adopt these, their names aren't anywhere connected to these, are they?

Ms. Kueck: No.

Commissioner Higbee: Not for the public eye?

Ms. Kueck: Correct. Yeah. Anything that's PII I've made sure is not going to show up here. There's no free text fields anywhere, anything that could have someone's name has been removed. That's like the private care facilities a lot of times or someone's name, so that information is hidden. Address information is hidden after the animals are private property, again, based off of FOIA guidance that we've received. There should not be any PII in here anywhere.

Commissioner Higbee: Cool.

Mr. Kuechle: Ms. McAlpine, you have a question? You're still muted.

Ms. McAlpine: What is a signal mint key?

Ms. Kueck: That is basically a descriptor of the animal's appearance. This first horse here, the H is for horse, M is male. If the horse was gelded, it would be changed to a G. The one is the number of whorls, and then we have right front, right hind, left front, and left hind legs are the next four. A, for example means that there's no white on that horse's leg. And then the next one is markings on the horse's head. Like star, star strip, snip. A, again is no white, B would be a star. And then the last one is the horse's color. If I remember correctly, M is dun, but don't quote me on that. And I think that information's on our website.

Ms. McAlpine: There's a key or there will be a key somewhere?

Ms. Kueck: Yeah. That's something that we're still working on would be providing that information on here it's easy for people to find, as well as some general instructions folks would to know how to run these reports. And also probably like a data dictionary they know, yeah, signal mint key, what is that? Or disposition, what does that mean?

Ms. McAlpine: Good, thank you. And then this is just a personal issue for me. Dead, D-E-A-D is so cold. I keep on seeing dead.

Commissioner French: Deceased.

Ms. McAlpine: Deceased, thank you.

Commissioner French: Expired.

Ms. McAlpine: Anything, but dead sounds uncaring, disrespectful, cold, particularly as it flips through. So that's just my personal comment. I kind of shudder when I think of the poor dead things.

Ms. Meredith Kueck: Right. I understand that completely. That is how they're listed in our database. I don't know that that's something that I would be able to change. All of this information is pulled out of our Wild Horse and Burro program system.

Ms. McAlpine: Okay, well we'll tell the head honcho that dead just makes us think of Halloween.

Ms. Kueck: I will pass that on.

Ms. McAlpine: Thank you.

Ms. Kueck: Yeah.

Mr. Kuechle: Dr. Perryman?

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Yeah, just a quick question. I assume it does, but I thought I better ask just for my own information. All the freeze branding and other ID requirements that you guys have enlisted in this database, they all meet all the USDA disease traceability requirements, do they?

Ms. Kueck: I assume so. I don't know the history of the freeze marks and how we registered those, to be honest. I know that the microchips are registered and they would come back and say that this is a BLM Wild Horse and Burro program microchip. But as far as the freeze marks-

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: The reason why I ask is in the COP standards, maybe it's there, I can't find it, but there's a number of things for biosecurity about pilot horses and lead horses and things that are coming to a gather, for instance. But there's nothing about disease traceability going the other direction. Dr. Lenz may know more than I do. Tom, could you chime in on that?

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Run that by me again.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Disease traceability. My question was is do the ID methods that are listed in their database here that the Bureau uses, do they meet the USDA disease traceability requirements? All the horses coming in, pilot horses and lead horses and stuff, there's biosecurity stuff in the COP standards about that, but there's nothing going the other way. I assume they do meet those standards, but I-

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Yeah, those are the standards that they use today to identify horses either for transport or disease tracking.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Great. Thank you.

Ms. Kueck: Dr. Kane can probably add to that if you have anything.

Dr. Kane: Was that already answered sufficiently?

Ms. McAlpine: Can't hear you.

Dr. Kane: I was listening to her on how to turn the microphone on. The animal ID requirements meet the USDA requirements in spades because it meets it in multiple ways. The microchip as well as the signal mint key. As far as traceability in horses, there are no traceability rules in horses the way there are in breeding cattle. So, they meet all the USDA standards.

Ms. Kueck: All right, thank you Dr. Kane. Let's see. I don't know if I showed the rest of this last section. It just has the death information, manner of death and cause of death on here. This full report, are there any questions on this one before I close out of here? Okay. We do have one. Sorry.

Dr. King, Ph.D.: Sorry, I have another question about the whole microchip and all of that. The only place that this is registered is in like the BLM database? Because like I know with pet Microchips, there are a bunch of different databases where vets have to look it up, but then if one of these horses turned up somewhere and someone scanned the microchip, where would that take a veterinarian or whatever?

Dr. Kane: They're registered, just like any microchip that's used in equines or pets. There's no place where microchips can be traced to individual owners universally. The microchip is traced to the organization that purchased the microchip from the manufacturer, and then at that point forward, it's up to whoever sold the microchip to trace it. If you look up a BLM Mustang microchip in the national database, you'll see who the manufacturer was and then they would record that it was sold to the BLM. After that, that's all the information you can get publicly. There's no other public information tied to that number. You would have to contact the BLM to get information on that microchip, at which point they would release what's public. But obviously they're not going to release PII. Does that answer your question?

Dr. King, Ph.D.: Yeah, I think so. It's like a dog or a cat that if you wanted to register it under your ownership, you would have to do that through a company?

Dr. Kane: Absolutely correct. If an individual adopter wants to register a microchip to their name, they have to go to a microchip registry and do that. And they're free to do that. You can register your own, you just can't go look up individuals because all you'll get is the organization that manufactured it or sold it.

Dr. King, Ph.D.: Thank you.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Dr. Kane, these are USDA chips, right?

Dr. Kane: Well, they're not USDA chips. They're chips purchased through contract, but they are 840 USDA approved chips.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Right, right.

Dr. Kane: They meet the standards for USDA microchips.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Right.

Dr. Kane: They meet the standards for USDA microchips, the 840 Bio-Thermo chips.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Yeah, 845, I mean you can trace the first three numbers to go to the manufacturer. So, 845 would be marked, but the USDA chips have to be sold to a registered facility. So, that's what these are, right?

Dr. Kane: That should be what? I didn't hear the last thing you said.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: That's what these are, USDA.

Dr. Kane: Yes. Yeah, they're traceable to BLM-

Dr. Lenz, DVM: To BLM, right. That's my point.

Dr. Kane: ...which is as far as you can trace them unless the adopter registers them to their personal information.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Right. Right.

Ms. Kueck: Okay. Anything else on this one before I get back out of here? Nope? Okay. Just have a couple more to show you. They're not quite as involved as that one was. They should go pretty quickly. Next one will be, sorry, fertility control treatments. These can be entered in our database either associated with individual animals or entered in bulk associated with a treatment event. So, the first one I'll show you is by animal. Our search criteria here are the capture herd place and then treatment date. So, for this one, we're going to look at the Oregon South Steens HMA, which I believe is right here. These are typically a little bit easier to read when your screen isn't blown up so big. And we're going to look at January 1st, 2023 through January 1st, 2024.

Here, you can see, again, we have our freeze mark, chip numbers for these animals that received treatments, the capture herd place and date, as well as their last release herd place and date. And then down here is our treatment information. So, you can see this first horse received two doses of GonaCon at the Burns facility and then was released back onto the South Steens HMA. These records can also be entered in association with a gather event. Say they did it at temporary holding and the animal never went to a facility, so that's when these last three fields would be filled out. It would have the gather event name and then also the HMA information there. So, this one is pretty straightforward.

Oh my goodness. Sorry, I don't know why it keeps doing that. Do you all have any questions on it? I can get back in there really quick if you need. Nope? Okay, sounds good. We'll go on to the next one then, which is, again, fertility control treatments by treatment events. These are bulk treatments. We have treatment herd place and date for our filters. This one we're going to look at Sand Wash Basin in Colorado and January 1st of 2020 through January 1st of 2024. We can see multiple events. Again, this one is pretty straightforward. Since it is bulk, we just have a total number treated rather than the individual animal information.

We've got our herd place in case you selected multiple HMAs that you want to look at, our date, treatment type and treatment event name. You can see on some of these, it's all one treatment event, but they treated different numbers on different dates you can look at that breakdown. Have any questions here on this one? Nope? Okay, perfect. Just one more then.

Last one is foals born in facilities. We do get lots of questions about foals born after gather events. So, that's why we have this one here. Report criteria are the birth facility, which you can get if you looked at that initial report and you can see where all your animals went to initially from a gather, then you can utilize that to know what birth facility to look for. And then also birth date and the foal herd place of origin is an optional field. We haven't always tracked that information; I didn't make it a required field.

We'll pick Ridgecrest and then dates between January 1st of 2022 and January 1st of 2023. I'm going to leave the herd place of origin blank. And we have our list of freeze marks, chip numbers, again, identification information, current disposition of the animals. Here, you can see the herd place of origin for each one. Older records won't have that, like I said. Then our birth date, birth location. And then some of our foals are associated with a mare, and if that's the case, that information is entered here. That's not always possible due to the size of some of our facilities, but when it can be tracked, that is entered and then captured here.

So, that is all of the reports. And like I said, this is still test. We're working towards getting this out there for the public. Again, just need to work on some instructions, report descriptions, but hopefully, within the first half of this year, we'll have this out there for the public. Do you all have any questions? Yes.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Is it me or her? I don't know. Did you have a question? Oh.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Okay. So, I have a question about, this reporting interface will be for all the horses that have been freeze branded or microchipped, right?

Ms. Kueck: Yes.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: So, that includes the ones that are in long-term holding?

Ms. Kueck: Yes.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: But it doesn't include all the ones on the range. So, there's a lot on the range that have not been-

Ms. Kueck: Correct.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.....microchipped. But there are some on the range that have been microchipped or they've branded?

Ms. Kueck: Yeah, the vast majority of the animals out on the range don't have a freeze mark or a microchip or any way for us to track them here in the system. We do have some that are captured, freeze marked, prepped, and then released. And those we do have in here.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Okay, everybody that's been branded and/or microchipped is in that system and could eventually be looked up?

Ms. Kueck: Yes.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Very cool, thank you.

Ms. Kueck: Anyone else? Okay, awesome. Well, thank you all for your time. I appreciate it.

Ms. Carlilse: Thank you. That is a lot of work for sure. Bryant?

Mr. Kuechle: Yes. Moving right on along, unless everyone wants to stretch and move around a little. We've got a couple more hours here with some great presentations coming up. We want to stay up. Paul Griffin is joining us now for the PopEquus modeling demonstration.

PopEquus Modeling Demonstration

Dr. Paul Griffin, Ph.D.,

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: Well, my name is Paul Griffin. Thank you very much for your time today. Herds of wild horses and burros are a living reminder of the countless partnerships between horses and burros and people for the last 500 years on this continent and people of so many cultures. We, as an agency, are humbled and honored by the responsibility to look after their wild herds as Assistant Director Branham was talking about this morning. But for those herds to be self-sustaining in perpetuity, they need landscapes that are vibrant and diverse and resilient to drought and productive in the long term.

And over the last few meetings, the Board has asked for panel discussions about environmental factors that can influence the self-sustaining nature of those herds. Things like climate, change in climates and drought and domestic livestock grazing. And in this presentation, the BLM is presenting more about the PopEquus modeling interface and how expectations from that model do seem to be supported by empirical evidence. And what PopEquus is, it's an online wild horse population model.

Is there some feedback that's happening or is that just off?

Ms. Ortiz: I think that's just a microphone.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: Okay. So, it's an online model that anyone can use and to structure management scenarios for a herd either with or without removals, with or without different kinds of fertility control, and then compare those outcomes in terms of population size and cost. And population ecologists and computer scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey Fort Collins Science Center developed the model based on the best available science about wild horse demography and the effects of fertility control methods and information about costs.

And we, as an agency, can use this model to meet BLM's policy guidance that fertility control should not threaten the long-term viability of any herd and to make sure that no management alternative would be likely to crash a population. We can also use it to learn more about comparative costs and long-term demographic outcomes for different scenarios. But to be clear, this modeling is not the only kind of analysis that BLM uses when it's comparing management alternatives for any given HMA. But since it does inform agency actions, it's important to use real-life data outcomes and compare that against what the model predicts and check on the assumptions that underlie that model as much as possible.

So, today's presentation is I'm going to be focusing on evidence that tests and validates the assumptions behind this model. If I could go to the next slide, please.

The text on this is going to be very small for you to see, but it's your recommendation number three and our response. And in your recommendation number three, you asked for the BLM to choose two HMAs and demonstrate in brief how the PopEquus model can be used to make predictions about demographic outcomes. And to paraphrase just a part of our response, we said that we will report back to you on foal and adult ratios and population growth rates in two HMAs, and the extent to which the population trends in those HMAs are or are not consistent with predictions from this PopEquus model.

So, as I stumbled through this morning, we haven't picked those two HMAs yet. And so, what I'm going to be reporting on today instead of that type of report is more like a precursor. The outline of what I'll be talking about is that we've prepared to talk first about how PopEquus is already being used by the agency to inform decision-making. I'll do a little live demo of how anybody can access and use the PopEquus model. And then a little bit in more detail, I'll present about monitoring results from agency actions that inform about annual herd growth rates, which was an earlier question today, and effects of fertility control efficacy, including GonaCon, a little bit about PZP and IUDs with the... And to give you the upshot, it's basically that the quantitative results of those monitoring data pretty well line up with what's predicted in PopEquus model expectations.

And then I also have that photo there. I think it was some halogeton, but somebody else could correct me if I'm wrong, to remind me to say and just emphasize again that PopEquus, it does not model ecological interactions. Herd management decision-making is informed by so many other factors that go into multiple use planning. That could include monitoring land health standards, utilization, sensitive species, any local considerations for that herd, agency planning for other species and resources. Anyway, let's just remember that all that real-world ecology and land management use decision-making is actually much more complex than the model we're going to talk about today. Okay. Thanks.

So, USGS made this peer-reviewed version of PopEquus available to the public online starting in 2023. And for the BLM, there was a February 2024 memo that confirms that PopEquus may be used for BLM NEPA analyses, and it takes the

place of an older framework of population modeling, which was called WinEquus from the 1990s. So, a lot has changed since then. I used a rotary dial phone in those days.

And what I'm showing here is a Forest Service-led EA from the Devils Garden Herd, which we heard about earlier today. I'm showing it because the BLM EAs that I know of that have used PopEquus are either preliminary EAs or they're in preparation or they're, like I said, under appeal or litigation. So, here's an example from something that's already had a final decision from their final EA. Anyway, and that partly explains why BLM doesn't have your two HMAs selected yet per your recommendation number three.

So, in this example from their 2023 environmental assessment, there's a graph and some tables that I just screenshotted out of their EA. And really, it's just to show you an example of how PopEquus can be used in NEPA analyses. The graph shows population outcomes over time for four different management scenarios that all involve some gathering and some degree of fertility control or not, but probably because they all involve gathering, they drop down to within AML pretty quickly and they show that they hover around AML over time. And again, these are just examples.

In the top table, top right table describes the general outcomes that are expected under a few different possible action alternatives that they had in terms of what's the probability that that herd will get to AML over time and how many animals would have to be treated with fertility control or gathered and removed. And then the bottom table summarizes some model outcomes in terms of the cost for on-range costs. And when we talk about on-range costs for this model, that's things like gathers and fertility control treatments.

Also, off-range costs, which would include care and feeding and preparing animals possibly to be adopted and placement, the cost of placing them, and also long-term holding over the entire lifetime of animals after they've been gathered. So, the population graph just shows 10 years, but the off-range costs does include all the way out through the lifetime of animals that are gathered. Next slide, please.

Mr. Kuechle: And I think that's your PopEquus.

Dr. Paul Griffin, Ph.D.: Yeah. So, I'd like to just do a little demo of PopEquus if possible. Can I get a... There you are. Great, thank you. So, this is-

Mr. Bryant Kuechle: Hold on, we're not quite up here yet.

Dr. Paul Griffin, Ph.D.: Okay, when it comes up. So, this is just a view of the USGS PopEquus. The link for it is in the slide show number four, but look up PopEquus, it'll be the first thing that comes up. And I'm going to just do a little demo. We can imagine there's this hypothetical HMA, and let's imagine that the starting population size is 500, but the AML, there's some controls on the far left, and that's the basics here. What fraction of the population is female? I'll come back to this. What's the inherent growth rate of the population if you didn't do any fertility control? What's the AML?

And at the end, the user... Again, this is public, so anybody can tinker with this and come to their own conclusions, which I encourage everybody who's listening, better than almost any video game, and it's free. Anyway, you can tinker with removal options, like what years do you want to have predetermined removals? That is gather events where animals aren't coming off the range. You can tinker with options for various fertility control methods like GonaCon. What years do you want to treat animals with GonaCon? What are the ages of animals that you would want treat or not treat?

All this is customizable, but the bigger, neat tool that's down near the bottom is that you can compare different alternatives. And there's a couple that are checked always as defaults, which is no management, that is just exponential growth. Removals would be a management scenario where you remove animals to keep the herd within AML. Let's also click a few boxes for ZonaStat-H. That would be treating animals with a PZP, liquid PZP vaccine. How about removals and ZonaStat-H? So, that'd be a combination of removing animals, plus using vaccine.

And as you can see, there's a lot of choices here. And then what if we just did ZonaStat-H by darting? So, the first ZonaStat-H would be by gathering animals. The second would be just darting. And there's even an option of where you can save remove down to AML in year one and then use darting. When you hit the performs, I'm leaving out the first one with no management because that's just exponential growth and it makes the Y-axis go to really high numbers and it's hard to see a difference between all the other scenarios. So, I'm leaving that out.

After you hit perform simulations, the model churns away. And behind the scenes, what's going on is it's simulating the births, and however Ms. McAlpine wants to term the expiration of the horses that are simulated there and whether they're treated with fertility control or not. And technically, it's a stage-based stochastic model with 20 different life stages. You got males, you got females. They're all being simulated, hopefully. And whether they do or don't have foals at different times, the number of animals that are simulated as having been treated with different fertility control methods influences whether they have foals or not.

So, after that little moving bar is done, then you can pick up the results. And let's see. Okay, great. So, this top graph shows you, all right, here's these five different hypothetical scenarios. We started at a population size of 500 and over time, what would happen if we did these different scenarios, assuming that the underlying demographic rates in the model are correct.

And so, the removals-based lines are solid black lines and they get you to within AML, which is the two dotted lines near the bottom. The blue is like if you just were treating with ZonaStat by at times of gathers, so that is not every year, but only when you gather animals. And the green line is ZonaStat, if you can dart lots of animals every year. There were some assumptions about what proportion can be darted and you can tinker with those here with 75%.

Anyway, so you can compare these lines and say to yourself, "Well, if my assumptions were correct about this, then I'm going to make these conclusions about the relative outcomes." All right, so this is great as sometimes when you're connected to a web-based resource, that's an actual thing, you lose connection but-

Mr. Kuechle: It's still on the screen. I don't know. It's off the Zoom.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: It's on the screen. So, we lost connection on the computer here, but that's okay. What it does mean is we can't do an example of like, hey, what if we started with different numbers? So, if we could go to the next slide back to the presentation, please. Besides comparing different... Yeah, I think this is number five.

Mr. Kuechle: You need to get back?

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: No.

Mr. Kuechle: Okay.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: Besides comparing different scenarios, something that you can do, I'd love to see more people do it, I throw it as a possibility for intrepid researchers or interested parties, you can try varying the starting scenarios, the starting situations for any given herd and say, "Well, how would the outcomes be different if I tinkered with this starting value?" And so, for example, what I'm showing on the screen here is the same sets of scenarios, same alternatives, but with different starting numbers, and how does that change what management alternatives might be optimal if you were trying to maximize for cost or number of animals treated.

So, what we have is, in the upper right, we have these same four scenarios. One is removals. I actually don't have my glasses. I think it's removals only, GonaCon at time of gather, GonaCon with darting. And help me out here, our fourth scenario.

Ms. Ortiz: Removals year one and GonaCon.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: Oh, oh, removals in year one and then follow-up with darting. Thank you so much. Okay, so in the upper right, we're starting at a population size of 300 for a herd that has an AML from two to 300. So, in other words, we're starting at AML and in the middle graph, we're starting at two times AML. And in the bottom graph, we're starting at three times AML. So, the relative efficacy of different management alternatives depends on where you start out.

This is the kind of approach that informs some of us in the agency when we have a bias, maybe you could say, of saying that if funds are limited and you're way over AML to start with, then spending a lot of money on fertility control to begin with doesn't lead to the population outcomes that you would like to see in a short period of time. So, it's a modeling based, it's a demographic based. We arrive at that conclusion through some thought. Anyway, if I could go to the next slide.

For example, you could even look at, if you started at different population sizes, you could look at what would be the ratio of the number of animals that would have to be removed to get to AML compared to the number that you treat with GonaCon. And if you start at a point where you're close to AML, then really, you don't need to remove very many animals and you can rely very heavily on fertility control treatment like Paul was saying earlier today. When you start at a point, a population size that's far over AML, like in this case 300% of AML, we have herds at 500% of AML, you need to remove quite a few more animals then treat with GonaCon to end up at AML.

Anyway, all this is to say that this is demography and understanding about fertility control efficacy can lead to conclusions about the relative costs and how many animals would have to be treated depending on the starting size of your populations.

Now, within the PopEquus model, the mechanics behind the model are well-documented. And I know that some people would want to know more about these population projections, particularly when if they lead to conclusions that you don't like. Well, the mechanics behind the model, like I said, they are well-documented. That doesn't mean that the math is easy, but they are transparent. And what I mean by that is there's a tab in the online called mechanics, and if you scroll down through that tab, it describes the 20-age-stage, two-sex stochastic matrix model that's used to get to these outcomes. And that's high-level demography, but anybody can learn it, and the R script behind it is also publicly available.

But the other thing that I'd like to dwell on today is the assumptions behind the fertility control efficacy rates. And this is something that we hear, have heard a lot about in individual discussions, how reliable are the assumptions behind this model? So, if I could go to the next tab, please.

I'm going to start with growth rate. And all of the BLM monitoring data that I'm going to talk about today are unpublished so far and we will continue to pursue trying to get them published, but BLM monitoring and budgets and staff performance evaluations are not set up to reward publications in the same way that they would be for like USGS or a scientific agency. So, in the meantime, we hope that you all appreciate that we're trying to share these results with the Board as a good first step.

This first type of monitoring-based validation of the PopEquus model assumptions is about wild horse growth rates. And growth rates, including the value for the underlying growth rate for any herd, is really central for any demographic model. In PopEquus, you can use values from zero to 32%. The general expectation is, on average, it's about 20% for horses and burros, a little higher for horses than burros. And a 2016 meta-analysis by Jason Ransom found that a 19% average was very realistic for free-roaming horses. And the default value for PopEquus is 18%.

And so, the user can change that based on what they might know about a local herd, whether it has a higher or lower inherent growth rate. And like Paul McGuire said earlier, this is the net growth per year. So, it's a per capita net growth per year accounting for births, but also accounting for deaths. So, for example, if you had a herd of 100 to start with in March of 2025 and an 18% annual growth rate, then by March 2026, there would've been some births, there would've

been some deaths and you'd expect to be 18% higher or 118 the following year. So, yeah, like I said, our expectation is that pretty much all BLM managed herds have a net positive growth rate. Next slide, please.

So, as we've explained to the Board in past meetings, the BLM conducts these standardized aerial surveys with peer-reviewed, scientifically-validated statistical analysis methods. We mainly use simultaneous double-observer method surveys and analyses, and we can make inferences from those surveys that include population size estimates and precision estimates, so uncertainty values. We've been doing that pretty consistently since 2014 using these repeatable methods.

And now, this is an example of some data that Brian Folt and Kate Schoenecker from U.S. Geological Survey, along with Michelle Crabb, the BLM population biologist for the Horse and Burro Program, they've been working to prepare a West-wide analysis of wild horse population growth rates. And they've been analyzing populations that is single HMAs or complexes with multiple HMAs where there's really high quality time series with lots of repeated aerial surveys that have good estimates. And overall, that covers about a third of the HMAs that BLM manages across the West.

This is a snapshot on the screen from just one of those places, the Owyhee Complex of five HMAs, and it's a time series. You got these green circles with the black borders around them are four times when there was a good aerial survey. There's very faint, but they're there, uncertainty estimates, error bars. And then we also have... We know exactly how many horses were removed at different times and those are shown as orange dots on this graph. And then we also know exactly how many mares were treated with fertility control vaccine and those are shown as pink dots.

Anyway, so this is one of many populations that they're using in this model of analyzing time series and removals and fertility control methods to look at overall growth rates over time. And it's in the works. So, I don't have the big results, but they're working to estimate, like I said, annual growth rates and effects of fertility control.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: Annual growth rates and effects of fertility control, and also looking at effects of population density because there can be a feedback between population density and the growth of any wild animal populations. Next slide please. So like I said, I can't get into their unpublished results because I think they're in preparation or maybe even in review by now. But Brian Folt did give a talk about this at the Wildlife Society meetings in Maryland last fall with some preliminary results. And so I won't be scooping them to give this overview, which is that overall they included more than 30 populations, which covers more than 70 HMAs. They're looking, they had over 120 of these high-quality aerial surveys, so pretty good time series of data. And on the whole, it was somewhere between 18-ish and 20%-ish average growth rates across the west. But there was a lot of variation. There were a few herds that had growth rates as high as 25% per year or more, but none less than 5%. So they all had positive growth rates.

They also found some signal that fertility control has a per capita effect on growth rates. So yeah, the more animals you treat with fertility control, which in their study was immuno-contraceptive vaccines, the lower the growth rate. But in no cases of the populations that they studied did it go negative. So they continued to have positive growth despite whatever level of fertility control there was in any herd. And they also found a low... But it was measurable level of density dependence. So like at extraordinarily high population densities, you would have this decline in growth rate, but again, not to the point where you'd have negative growth or a declining population size. I can't wait until it's published, but that's as far as I can go on the growth rates for now. I would say the upshot on the growth rates is we're working on it and we're applying 10 years of high quality monitoring data, and the outcomes are in line with what we see from PopEquus, and then people can use those local values and plug it into a model. How am I doing on time?

Mr. Bryant Kuechle: Well, we were over anyways.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D: Oh, gosh, sorry. Well, okay. But now I'd like to get into fertility control methods. I think it's fair to say that there's a very high level of interest in what are the effects of GonaCon vaccine. I'm going to dwell on that more than anything else. And different people have different styles of learning. This is kind of a text approach of what I'm going to portray visually for the next few slides. The general overview is that a lot of what we know about the efficacy of GonaCon

vaccine comes from a study in Teddy Roosevelt National Park, but it's a category of vaccines that's also been studied in horses in other areas.

And what we know in black is that from that study that one dose of GonaCon vaccine has a relatively low efficacy that can reduce the foaling rate by about 40-ish percent for one year, and then that gets worse so that you're only reducing foaling rates by about 30% for year three after treatment. But that if a mare is treated with two doses of GonaCon vaccine separated by some time, then... And particularly if those two doses are separated by four years, then Baker and co-authors found that you can have one year where no foaling at all occurs, and then several years where foaling is about 85% lower than the background rate, and then several more years where it's about 50% lower than the background rate.

Now, we have not used a of... We don't have a lot of monitoring where BLM has treated mares, waited four years, and then treated them again and then had monitoring results because what we use is a treatment regime that is capture mares, give them a dose of GonaCon, hold them in captivity for about 30 days, give them another dose of GonaCon, and then release them back to the wild. And you have seen this described as part of the capture, treat, hold, and release contracts that we do for some gathers. In some cases we would treat them with PZP and others with GonaCon. But like I said, I think there's a lot of interest in what's the outcome of what happens when we treat them with GonaCon. Anyway, so what we've seen from cases where we have these mares and they're captured, treated once, held for 30 or so days, and treated again and released, is that we see about 15% of the mares don't have foals. Wait, I wonder if I had that backwards.

Yeah, I think what we see is about 85% efficacy for one year, about 70% efficacy the year after that, and about 55% efficacy the year after that. And the graphical presentation is going to portray this better than what I just described erroneously in numbers. So anyway, let's look at those graphs because they're correct. Next slide please. So now I'm going to walk through published versus monitoring. So, the published data are... This is from Baker et al in a couple of different studies. The top static line is kind of a background control that is untreated mares on average had about 75%... About 75% of them had foals in any given year. That's based on 12 years of data in their studies. Now the light and highest of the three lines there in gray is the effects on foaling of having one dose of GonaCon. And so in year two, after... There's very little effect in year one, that's because GonaCon, like PZP, is not generally thought to disrupt a pregnancy in progress.

So if a mare is treated in year zero, she will tend to have that foal that she was pregnant with in year one. So there's a time lag which makes for great cocktail party discussions, and it slows things down and it reduces the efficacy. Anyway, in year two, for mares that are treated with just one dose, you have a very low but measurable reduction in the number, the fraction that have a foal. And then that goes back up to pretty much close to the control values by year four. In contrast, mares that are treated with two doses that are given either a half a year apart, one year apart, or two years apart, that's the middle of the kind of darker gray lines, and they have a more substantial reduction in year two.

And then it goes, the number of foals that are born to horses treated with two doses at that spacing does go back up. It's along that middle line. And the most substantial published effect of GonaCon is the bottom or blue line. And that's for mares with two doses that were separated by four years. So they dropped down to zero, foals, in year two, and then kind of hover along gradually with a trend of an increasing fraction of them regaining fertility over time. But even by year seven, something like 70% of those mares had not yet regained fertility in those published studies. So that's the highest level of published efficacy is the two doses separated by four years.

So those are the data that informed PopEquus modeling. The one-dose effect is that higher kind of faint pink line, and that follows the one-dose effect. And the two-dose effect that's modeled in PopEquus is the darker bottom, purple, harder, darker purple line. So that's the contrast. In other words, PopEquus assumes that GonaCon has a longer lasting pretty high level of effectiveness when given two doses. And it's based on that most successful outcome where they're separated by four years. Next slide. Here's what we have in terms of monitoring data. We have several years of monitoring data. This is more than I talked about two years ago, as you might expect. In years two and three, we have some monitoring data from radio collared mares at Swasey Herd Management Area, Sulphur Herd Management Area, and Eagle Herd Management Area. These are places where radio collared mares were monitored monthly after release.

And so on average, in year two, it's about 85% of the mares did not have a foal, or you could say 15% or so did on average. In year three, only the Eagle HMA still had radio collars because radio collars have some limitations. They have battery life limitations, and we want to drop them off the mares before those batteries fail. But at Eagle, we still had enough mares with working batteries to get some foaling data, and about 70% of them had no foals, or you could say 30% did. And then we have year four data, and this is kind of newer to share, and that's based on some gather data at Swasey Herd Management Area where animals that had been treated in year zero, I think it was 2020, were recaptured in 2024, and we had a measure of how many mares came in with a foal off that gather, or nursing.

Again, what you see here is this increasing trend where these are mares... Now, this is mares treated with the BLM protocol of capture, treat once, hold for a while, treat again, release. So, this is monitoring data from our own mares. Yeah, so you see this increasing trend of fertility over time. Next slide please. And if you drew a line through all the BLM monitoring data that we presented there with standard errors shown, it's the orange line here. So here I'm showing the faint pink on top is the PopEquus expectations for what would happen with mares treated with one dose of GonaCon over time. Again, the dark purple line is the PopEquus expectations for mares treated twice. And it turns out that mares treated with this BLM application protocol, it's kind of in between. So, it's not actually as effective as you would think based on the Baker et al data for mares treated four years apart, but it's still a lot better than mares treated just once.

What can we conclude from this? It's not a perfect representation of the expectations that are in PopEquus. Okay, so when we ask USGS to revise PopEquus, we could say, "Let's have another option of efficacy curve that is in line with our monitoring data." But it does mean that if we treat mares with this method, we're certainly not going to be driving them to extirpation locally. And what else can we say? We can say that over time it looks like mares that are treated with this 30-day-ish booster regimen are over time tending to return to fertility. I think that's also something that a lot of people were interested to find out. Yeah.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: I was trying to think of the figures that you were just showing in terms of population growth rate. So, in order to have a stable population growth rate, what proportion of the mares each year would be in foal?

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: It depends on the underlying population growth rate for that population, but some work by Shulmann et al earlier this year, it jives with expectations from PopEquus, and that's about three-quarters of the mares. And you can...

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Wait, are you saying if three quarters-

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: Well, it depends what your goal is. If you wanted to have zero population growth rate...

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Yeah.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: And I don't know exactly what the percentage would be, but probably like 85%-ish mares would have to be effectively contracepted in any even year. But that's not what we aim for typically. I mean, even, we don't want 0% growth rate. We want our herds to have a lower growth rate. We don't want it to be zero. Yeah. But generally something like if 75% of your mares were effectively contracepted in any given year, then that would tend to have a pretty stable population size. And that's why we're interested in having longer-lasting effects of any given contraceptive because we don't want to have to treat 75% of the mares every year. That's quite a lot of potential handling or disturbance. And so if a mare only had to be treated once every five years, that would be a lot more trackable than every year.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Great, thank you.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: If I may, on the subject of GonaCon, there are a couple people in the audience who might have a higher expectation of my activities than are real. So I do help to procure GonaCon and distribute it to other staff members in the BLM. I'm convinced by the data that I've seen so far that it can be an effective and humane method for use. So there was a public comment that suggested that I think GonaCon is bad. I don't think that any particular method is inherently good or

bad because all fertility control methods have pluses and minuses. But on the whole, I think that the methods that we're using as an agency are effective and safe and humane right now. And the other member of the audience that overstates my potential influence is my mom. Hi, mom. Yeah.

Mr. Bryant Kuechle: Commissioner French.

Ms. Carlisle: One of the things that I enjoy is reading the minutes back that we have to read right before we come. Paul always says some real good things. Commissioner French had some stuff to say.

Commissioner French: Paul, I had a quick question. In the context of those three models, was there consideration to the animals themselves their body condition at the beginning of the study or each year? And secondly, the nutritional stresses that those horses are going through based on drought?

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: Not that I'm aware of, but I'm highly confident that the BLM would not have turned back any mares that were in poor body condition. The other thing is that since the mares that were used to inform this monitoring data were radio collared, there were separate requirements for them to be in good body condition to be used as part of this monitoring. So that may have had an influence on the outcome, but again, I don't think that we would, as an agency, treat and turn back mares in poor body condition.

Commissioner French: Not at that level anyhow. The difference is I don't think you'd have seen it. You haven't done it over a long enough period of time to really pick up that. But I was just curious, depending on the condition of those horses, that would have quite an impact on them.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: There are some studies out there that posit that mares that are in poor body condition would have a poor immune response to immuno-contraceptives and would therefore kind of counter intuitively have foals earlier than those that are in good body condition. But like I said, I don't think... Yeah, we wouldn't do that, I don't think.

Mr. Kuechle: Ms. McAlpine has her hand up, and then we'll go over to Dr. Perryman.

Ms. McAlpine: Go to Barry first. I just need to produce a laugh after being eight hours behind the screen. So answer his question first please.

Mr. Kuechle: Got it.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Okay. Thanks, Susan. I can't remember, refresh my memory, I don't think PopEquus has the ability to capture this or not, but when we get a mare that's 25 years old and she's still fertile, that's kind of a brutal process to become pregnant sometimes with some of the stallions that we have out there. Does PopEquus have the ability at this point in time to segregate age classes away to be able to say, "Okay, we're going administer at that level of accuracy and precision."?

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: Yeah, there's 20 age classes, but mares that would be 25 are in the oldest age class, and that includes, I think, mares that are 20 and older.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Okay, cool. Thanks.

Mr. Kuechle: Okay, just a really quick time check. If in the next 5 to 10 minutes we're able to wrap up, we might be able to keep ourselves back on track. Susan, did you have a question? I guess I wasn't entirely clear.

Ms. McAlpine: No, I just have a five o'clock comment that, based on my suggestion about changing the word death to either expired or deceased, how about at 5:09 Arizona time, we use passed over the rainbow bridge? That's it. You can tell I'm tired.

Mr. Kuechle: Thank you. Well, that will be recorded in the meeting minutes.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: If I could just very briefly talk about PZP expectations. I'm really not going to dwell on this. I'm just showing here that we do that. PopEquus does have different efficacy expectations for the different kinds of PZP vaccine that are out there. This one shows ZonaStat-H PZP vaccine, and published studies suggests that it basically lasts for a year or so for the first dose or two, but that as a mare, over the course of her life, receives more doses of PZP ZonaStat-H vaccine, it's expected that that becomes more and more effective until to the point where if a mare gets five or more doses, it's generally thought that she may become infertile for a very long time. Then the next one, similarly for PZP-22, there's published data that we used to get these underlying rates for PopEquus. The light pink value is for if a mare is only treated once, the middle line shows if a mare is treated twice, and those are based on published data.

The bottom, or longest lasting effect, is supposed. It's not based on published data, but it's kind of a published plus. So it's what we think might be plausible if a mare were treated three times with PCP-22. Next please. Okay, so the last fertility control results that I'll share have to do with comparing the rate of flexible intrauterine device retention that we've observed from monitoring compared to the expected rates that PopEquus uses for projection. So on this graph it's kind of the opposite. A hundred percent means that all the IUDs placed in the group were retained, and if a mare retains an IUD, she's not going to be having a foal. So just for this graph, everything's backwards. Thank you. You're welcome.

The higher the value, the better the IUDs did as contraceptives. And it shows a retention over time. So the good news here, again, is that BLM's monitoring data seem to be consistent with published results and with the PopEquus model. Specifically, the black dots and the black dotted line are based on results from the research paper by Holyoak who looked at Y-shaped silicone IUD retention on pastures, and they essentially found that about 75% of them were retained two years later.

And then the purple line, pretty straight line, is the PopEquus expectations based on the same pasture data. And then, now BLM has only released mares with IUDs at five HMAs. We haven't used it very much, but we do have some monitoring data that's in line with these expectations. The red triangles, they're kind of small, are from eight mares that were treated with IUDs at Swasey HMA in 2020, and they were released with radio collars, and they were checked every month. And in 2022 there's a red triangle that shows that two out of those eight had a foal at their side. The second red triangle, which is over in year four, is the same Swasey mares. They were gathered in 2024, and they were examined with ultrasound by a veterinarian. And at that point, four out of eight of them had a foal with them, and the other four had the IUDs in their uterus still.

So that retention from Swasey was in line with expectations. And then the other BLM data here comes from White Mountain Herd Management Area in Wyoming. Nine mares were treated with IUDs in 2022, and seven out of those were gathered in 2024. And of those seven that were gathered, four still had an IUD in 2024. That's the blue circle that's at about three years. So all in all those data points that we have from monitoring, it's a limited number of animals, but they do show that our data are in line with expectations from the PopEquus model. And so every mare that was treated with an IUD and gathered in 2024 was examined by a veterinarian. And the peer-reviewed studies that we included in analyses about potential effects of IUDs didn't report any severe health effects in the flexible IUD-treated mares in those studies.

But today I have to report to the Board the very sad news, and I regret to share it, but there was an 11-year-old 15-hand bay mare that was gathered in that 2024 Swasey gather that had been treated with an IUD, a flexible IUD. When she came in, she had a bad uterine infection. And because of the advanced condition of that infection and that there was no possibility... The veterinarian who examined her advised that there was no possibility of that mare recovering as a result of treatment before being returned to the range. So, the decision was made to follow our policy, which calls for humane euthanasia as an act of mercy for animals that are suffering and don't have a good prognosis of recovery. So I regret to inform you of that news, but even low-probability events like that can happen sometimes, of course. But that outcome-

Mr. Kuechle: We have a quick question here, Sir. Dr. Lenz.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: Yes, Dr. Lenz.

Mr. Kuechle: You're still muted, Dr. Lenz.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: How many foals will the average mare produce in a lifetime in the wild? Any idea?

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: I could venture a guess, but I'd rather not. I mean, I think that given... If you assume that on average a mare might live to 20, you could... And if the average fertility rate per year is approximately 60 to 70%, I suppose you might say anywhere between eight and 13.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Yeah, I would think somewhere, six or eight. I don't think it'd be as many as you'd think.

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: It would depend on the lifespan of that individual, I think.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Yeah. Yeah. Pregnant mares in their 20s are relatively rare, I would think. So that'd be an interesting number to know. Just kind of keep in the back of your mind, I would think. Any way to figure that out? Is there any data at all on individual mares?

Dr. Paul Griffin, Ph.D.: Well, so we don't have... I really think that some of the highest quality demographic data that we have come from animals that are radio collared, but because of the nature of radio collars and their limited battery life, we don't have any lifelong single animal monitoring data at that level of detail.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Yeah. I wonder if any of these herds that they've been applying fertility control through the years, where they've closely monitored herds, would have any idea?

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: Yes, yes. There's certainly some of the highest quality data that we have about effects of PZP fertility control, which I forgot to mention, we're encouraging the Science and Conservation Center to work with USGS to do a new meta-analysis on those effects. Some of them come from herds like the Pryor Mountain range where individuals are known from year to year, their treatment history is closely followed. That's very informative, but that wouldn't answer what the inherent lifetime number of foals that an untreated mare might have.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Okay, thanks.

Ms. Carlisle: Dr. King has a question. I'm going to try... Oh, you're good? Okay. What is the average foaling rate for an untreated population that you all are using? And is that just based on data from other studies or do you all have some good BLM site specific numbers?

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: There's no single value that I would tell you. If we can access PopEquus and open the mechanics tab, the fertility projection matrices would answer that question. And again, it would depend on what you assume your inherent growth rate is for a herd. So again, we can collect data about growth rates much more easily than about individual foaling rates because what we monitor over time, I think with pretty good confidence, is population size. And you can make inferences about change in population size over time. That's growth rates, but you can't count foaling rates from a helicopter very reliably.

I guess to wrap up on the IUDs, I did want to just say that of course, that outcome that I mentioned only underscores the importance of BLM continuing to monitoring the effects of IUDs. And our tentative gather plan does include gathers at two more HMAs where IUD-treated mares could be gathered and examined by a veterinarian to add to our information about those effects. Last slide please. The last thing I want to mention is that we do encourage... And actually not the very

last, the one preceding that. There's been some studies that inform what we know about predation in wild horse herds, a couple pretty recently. One from southeast Nevada by Iacono, and another from the Virginia Range by Shulmann et al.

And there's also some other work from Western Nevada by Andreassen. And the upshot is that certainly there are areas where mountain lions do take a real fraction of the foals and some of the yearlings, and a future update to PopEquus might be able to capture that. The current version of PopEquus does not reflect that option yet, but we can conclude that even places and in years where foal mortality is as high as 50%, we're still seeing population growth rate unless there's a really heavy application of fertility control as well. So that's the extent of my prepared... Thank you. I'm sorry that we're going so late.

Mr. Kuechle: It's not on you. We're just running late.

Ms. Carlisle: No, thank you very much. Commissioner French?

Mr. French: Just real quick, you may have mentioned this and I didn't catch it. What were the predators that were involved in that? We talking mostly...

Dr. Griffin, Ph.D.: Just mountain lions.

Mr. French: Mountain lions? Okay. Thanks.

Mr. Kuechle: Okay, well, thank you. Doesn't appear to be any other questions. We will move on. Everybody doing okay? Okay. All right, we're going to move on to our next agenda item, Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program update. I believe that's Jerri.

Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program Update

Jerri Bertola

Ms. Bertola: All right, so just a couple of updates here before I really get into the presentation that I have. It's been a while since I've been able to update the Board on kind of where we've been with CAWP and what we've been doing with the Animal Welfare Program. I think... And I just kind of summarized what we have accomplished so far in fiscal year '25. And so, we are already 14 assessments in because we've been looking at some of the facilities again. Primary focus has been on our prep facilities because we've been gathering so many animals that we would prioritize the prep facilities first. It's been almost two years, maybe a little over two years, since we were at the facilities doing assessments. So that's kind of where we started. I believe we still have two prep facilities to finish those assessments, and we'll have had those completed. We're trying to get that done this winter. And then we have two gathers that we have completed and a third one's underway right now. And then in '24, we had a total of seven gathers, two adoptions in one of our of range corrals. Our off-range corral, we had planned going somewhere else. The facility had heard about it, that where we were going was already done. They reached out and said, "Hey, could you guys come?"

Our facilities are actually reaching out and asking for things and wanting to show the improvements they've made over the last couple of years since the initial assessment. And that's been across the Board with those prep facilities. And they've definitely wanted to point out the things that had improved that they felt that they looked at as far as the standards and said, "Hey, we really put effort into fixing some of these things." Or additionally they would ask, "How can we improve this? This is what we thought, this is where we're at." The facilities have really taken that on and working on it. So that's what we have completed. Over the last two years, we've completed a total of 24 assessments, and I think there's a few more in there in the timeframe since I last updated the Board.

Going into this next piece, I was thinking what's the next steps for us with developing our animal welfare program? And in, I guess it was sometime in '23, late '23, Dr. Kane and I attended some additional training outside on auditing and really brought to attention some of the things that maybe we could focus, improve on our auditing program. And so we're

working at that eventually. Our big goal for that would be that we actually have a certified audit that is approved by an outside organization on this is how auditing would be done.

So working through that. It's a slow process but working through that. Some of that also required some additional training so that all of our team members could then be familiar with the auditing process and how that works. So we've been working through that slowly just because it takes a lot to get people together as you all are aware. So we're working through some of that.

But some of the other things that we're working on, behind the scene types of things that working on is once you step down the animal welfare from just the body, mind and behaviors, whether you look at the five freedoms or the five domains, then for us as BLM managing Wild Horses and Burros, what do we do? And so I drew my inspiration here from our Wildland firefighting community. 25 years ago I went through my first firefighting training, which a lot of BLM people are familiar with, a lot of agency people are familiar with.

And one of the things that still I can remember; not all the details; but was the 10 standard firefighting orders. This is the things that was going to keep our firefighters safe. But it was simple, short one-liner type things then with a little more information on what you would do. The NWCG website, that's the National Wildland Fire Coordinating Group has these 10 standard firefighting orders. And this is where I got the idea behind what right now we're looking at as the Wild Horse and Burro Program's animal welfare priorities. It's that next step on what we would do, building our own program.

The interesting thing with this is then it also ties to what we've been teaching in our herd management training courses for years. First and foremost, our number one priority is water. It's a basis for all life. We can't live without it. Our wild horses and burros cannot survive or thrive without it. Fresh, clean water needs to be available. And then just the amounts of water. Recognizing the amount that these wild horses and burros can consume in the wild or once they're brought in. And also recognizing that snow is not always a substitute for water. We've got to be able to have enough water to support these animals.

Number two, forage or feed, depending on where our animals are at. And when I was thinking about this, I was like, "Okay, what do we do that could be overarching, whether we're on range or off range?" Forage and having that in the natural setting. But we need to have it and manage it to a point that we're not doing resource degradation. Overgrazing leads to long-term damage. Our native vegetation communities can take years to recover. Some of them might not ever recover if we damage them to the point that some of them will never recover. We need to have that.

But also, once we have these animals at, whether it's at our off-range corrals or our adoption events, we also need to be making sure that the feed that we're providing is good quality hay and that we need to be feeding them two to 3% of their body weight. This bottom picture here, you can see that there's plenty of feet available for those horses at the adoption event.

One of the other things to consider. These horses will go clear the country. Sometimes they get there, and they look at the hay like I do. Like, "This is not alfalfa. What is this?" Those are other things for us to consider when we're talking about our feed. These horses are used to alfalfa hay once they've been in enough facility or a good quality grass hay. Once you get on the East Coast, things are a little bit different so making sure that there's plenty of feet in front of them to start on those adoption events is important.

So, our next one is cover or shelter In the wild, they're going to be using the natural cover topography; shrubs, trees. And in those harsh environments, they also use that to escape the wind. They can stand out there in temperatures that are a lot harsher than what I would be comfortable in and they can turn their butt into the wind and they find those little places where they're able to receive protection. We're also looking at the shelter requirements, and one of the things that I think that BLM has done a fairly good job on is looking at it by region. Not everywhere is the same. What's required in arid places is not the same that's going to be required in humid places. And so you need to have those changes. And so some of our requirements are slightly different. Again, wind is a big one, especially for our compromised animals.

The next one is space. We all need our space, whether it's our own personal bubble, so that we can be the human that we're going to be. These animals need to have the space that they can have so that they can have some of their natural abilities to be a horse, to be a burro. They need to be able to get away from danger, but also this is how they play. This is how they have fun. So, whether it's on the range in our herd management areas, or it's once we bring them into captivity in our pastures and corrals, they still need to have space so that they can get away, they can play.

So those four things are what we have been teaching in our herd management trainings. The first one I attended was in '06. I'm sure that it goes back further than that, but those are the four basics that we need. I thought it was interesting when I was putting this all together. Those were my first four and when it falls out, those are some of the priorities and they go clear across whether we're on the wild or we're in captivity.

Our next one. These could be interchangeable, but if we don't have sound, healthy legs and hooves, we can't get from point A to point B. If we can't walk, if we can't get from food to water, then we have a problem. So we really need to manage our animals so that we don't have these defects.

Improper hoof care, once they're adopted, is one of the most common causes for lameness. We need to make sure that we are doing our preventative hoof care, our maintenance of the hooves before the animals' feet are too long, the hooves are too long. Sound and healthy legs and hooves is the next step and what I feel like is our next progression. And that's on the range and that's once they're captured too. It doesn't matter where they're at. We need to have sound animals. They can be adopted and that it can be a useful animal.

Next. The next one, and this one is going to get broken down here just a little bit more, but as having a biosecurity plan. Now whether that's on the range and we have stipulations in place on how we're going to have other horses that come into our HMAs, we should be thinking about this. What kind of disease prevention controls do we have in place. But also biosecurity plans that we have at our facilities and just a bigger picture. How are we going to prevent? And if we do have something, how do we respond? So. number six is a biosecurity plan.

Number seven is handling. So, the animals in the wild, generally we don't handle those, but recognizing that they are disturbed by different things and how we communicate that with some of our users. That might be something that we're looking at. Also, once they are gathered and removed from public land, using pressure and release methods when handling the animals, allowing the animals to move at their own pace when it's safe to do so. Recognizing the differences in handling wild horses and burros. They don't respond the same way. What you do with a horse might work with a burro. What you do with a burro may be completely different than what you are going to try with a horse just because they respond to things so different. So, knowing that and recognizing that there is a difference.

Also, taking the time that's needed. Sometimes we have to step back, especially when dealing with burros. Sometimes we have to step back and regroup. Sometimes they don't respond like we want them to or think they're going to, and sometimes it's their time, not our time. And then just the appropriate use of handling aids. When to use them, how to use them. We have them, but if we don't have to use them, even if it's just a flag or a rattle paddle, knowing when is appropriate is another thing that is important for us for handling.

Number eight. This is a step-down to our biosecurity plan, and some could and some will say that it is already included in the biosecurity plan, but I felt like this was a step-down for me. In my brain, this is the next step. We have our plan once they've been gathered. We need to adhere to our vaccination plan. It's important. It's how we protect our animals, our naive animals, and it's how we're going to keep things safe. I have listed here the different vaccinations that are required by policy, and we have specific policy on how and when those should be administered and we need to make sure that we're doing that.

The next one is timely healthcare. If we have an animal that is injured and there are healthcare decisions that we can make to help the animal recover, we need to do that timely. We need to also be ready to make those hard decisions. Euthanasia is not a fun decision to have to make. It's difficult whether we're talking about our wild horses, our burros, our own pets.

We have to make these decisions. It's not easy. If we do not have team members that can make those timely decisions we need to make sure that we're working with people that can make those decisions. A lot of times we rely on and get valuable input from APHIS veterinarians that are on site with us or that we work with. But the ultimate decision to euthanize animals comes back to the BLM. Our employees take it very serious, but we need to be able to make those timely decisions and they're not fun and they're not easy, but we do have a euthanasia policy that helps direct and guide us in what is the best interest of those animals. Making those timely healthcare decisions is very important.

And our 10th one is recognizing the enrichments that we already have. A lot of times people will think about some of the big enrichments that are added. We have lots of little ones, but one of the biggest ones that I think that we should recognize is the fact that we try very hard not to isolate individual animals. They're group animals. We try to keep them in a group just like the picture in the background shows. We try to work that in as much as possible. But we also have other enrichments that these animals have in smaller settings and we need to recognize those. That that's a positive thing and that we are making steps and strides. And this goes all the way from on the range, through gathering, to our corrals to our adoption events. And then a lot of adopters will also have that once it goes over into the compliance end, which we haven't got all that linked together just yet. Work in progress. But yes, recognizing our enrichments.

So those are the 10 things that jump out in my mind, simplified to one, two-word type topics for us to be thinking about. The long-term goal would be to have some visuals to go along with these and then have them to where we could have them on our website where people could do a quick reference just as those reminders. So as part of our training and education, we'll continually be training and educating on animal welfare. It's changed drastically in the last 20 years. I expect it's going to continue to change. Public perceptions changed, and as we make these adaptions and changes, that's what we'll be looking at as well.

So that's the updates on what we're working on. There's some other side topics and whatnot that we have that we're still working on. Some pocket guidebooks that will be helpful for our field personnel so they're not lugging around large volumes of documents. But some small quick references so that they're like, "Wait, there's something here," so that they can jog their mind and remember. So, we're working through some of those as well as some more training and education and some examples for our comprehensive animal welfare program.

So hopefully I got us back in time.

Ms. Carlisle: Board?

Commissioner Pearson: I think your points were spot on. I think you're covering everything that I can think of as far as animal welfare.

Ms. Bertola: Thank you.

Commissioner Pearson: Especially those that are in holding facilities because that's important to all of us. So thank you.

Ms. Bertola: Thank you.

Ms. Carlisle: Do you have some examples of some of the ... you were saying recognizing the little things in terms of enrichment. What are some examples of some of that, that are going on at the holding facilities or with adopters?

Ms. Bertola: Yeah. Some of them that we have; and it's still small scale. Enrichment is a new concept for us, but we do have some of the brushes that are out there. We also have some locations that, trying to help with natural hoof care, have added concrete. They have to walk over the concrete areas to help as far as maintaining the hooves. That type of stuff. It's really funny because they really like to play on those.

Also, the mounding. Sometime the manure removal, some of those end up being great play places for animals. So granted, you have to be careful on the moisture content in some of those, but some of those, depending on which location we're at, can be very successful.

I was trying to think. There was another one, but I totally lost it. So those are a few that we have that I can think of. And I know there's a couple others, but I totally lost them right now. So I'll probably remember tonight in the middle of the night. But those are some of them.

Dr. Lenz?

Dr. Lenz, DVM: I was going to say that I think those are outstanding. If you can do all of those, that's great. On the hoof care, I know a lot of folks back in this part of the country because we don't have a lot of rocks, put gravel alleyways in where the horses have to go across gravel back and forth to eat or back out at the pasture to help wear their feet down. Of course, the best one to do is to trim their feet manually every six to eight weeks. But I wonder in your lameness, so you also looking at congenital defects of these horses like calf need or bench need or some of the conditions the horses have that information-wise, I predispose them to shortened life or lameness or-

Ms. Bertola: Yes, those are things that we would like to encourage, especially as it links back to our euthanasia policy. And then I just did think of another one. Some of our facilities are in locations where we do have a lot of rock in them. We do have some. Actually here in California, the Litchfield facility uses the rock and rotates those horses to also help. So, they have a couple of pastures. Not pastures. I feel like they're pastures because those pens at Litchfield are pretty good size, but they rotate horses through there and it helps in between some of the maintenance. So just trying to recognize some of those things that we already have in place and really encouraging people to think about some of these things from a different, I guess, standpoint.

Commissioner Higbee: Yeah, I-

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: I was interested ... Oh wait, sorry.

Commissioner Higbee: Go ahead. Go ahead.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: When you were talking about the handling, the first thing on your list was something about pressure and release methods. Why did you specify pressure and release as opposed to other handling? What was the idea there as opposed to, say, positive reinforcement or something like that? Is it specifying that particularly or what was the idea?

Ms. Bertola: I think in my mind that's the easiest for us to explain, is pressure and release. We can see that. If we're applying too much pressure, we can see that, we can describe that. It's something that we're familiar with so just encouraging people to be cognizant of how they're moving, how they're using their flags. And there's times where you don't need your flag. If we don't need it, let's not be using it. So just some of those techniques. And that goes the way from the pressure and release as far as the helicopter use goes, all the way to when you start in the gentling programs. So just being receptive to step back and look. There's other things. We could say more natural horseman type, but without getting too specific, pressure and release seems to be a general term that people generally know what we're talking about without getting too specific.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Right. And so I guess what you're saying is you're really focusing on the release part of it?

Ms. Bertola: Well, there's times where we need to apply pressure because the situation could be worse and you need to apply that pressure. But as our employees and our contractors are working with these animals, we need to know when those situations are. One, for our own safety. Our people's safety, our contractors' safety first and foremost. And knowing how to do that and being able to explain that to people is important.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kuechle: Commissioner Higbee?

Commissioner Higbee: Yes, just a comment. I thought it was interesting when you talked about taking horses back east and putting them back there, the difference in the quality of feed. In our drier, higher elevations that we have here in the west, our feed is extremely potent and you can make horses and or burros sick for that matter by overfeeding. But you get back in the south, a friend of mine hauled a load of bucking horses to Missouri to put on a rodeo, and when he got there and unloaded the horses, they had big, long troughs Plum full of oats, and he was having a fit. And he called me and he said, "What do I ..." I said, "Look, talk to them to see where those oats came from." Well, they were local and I said, "You know what? You don't need to worry."

Because the feed there, where they have so much moisture, they don't have the potency that we do here. So what I'm saying is that feed is washy, so if you'd fed them horses, that same amount of oats where we come from here in the west, they'd all die.

To answer your question on the pressure. The way the pressure works is if you pressure an animal, the minute he moves away from the pressure, you give him that space.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Right.

Commissioner Higbee: Now you've taught him to move away from the pressure. And so by handling animals that way, they don't become terrified of what they're doing. They learn to accept the pressure and move with it instead of being crowded or shoved or forced into doing something they don't want to do.

Ms. Carlisle: I think that we have desires for these beautiful accommodations for all horses that are gathered off the range. But the reality of the situation is that those don't exist at the moment. It doesn't mean that different partnership organizations and the BLM and the Forest Service aren't looking for those opportunities.

It's really great that you are taking this line of what do we have now and how do we make it the best that it can be for the animals that are there now, even if we aren't in the perfect situation yet? So it's nice to hear that you're pursuing things like figuring out with what you have, what you can do, instead of just giving up and being like, "Well, eventually we'll have a really great place and we'll worry about it then."

One of the Forest Service holding facilities, they have a little more space and a little less horses, there so I realize it's a totally different situation, but it's on that idea of use what you have and figure out what you can do with it. And one of the things they've done is held out some areas that are not where horses live all the time, and they can use it as a turnout, and they can put obstacle courses and brushes and things like that out there. And I think there would be a few situations where BLM could do similar things, but it's that idea of thinking outside of the box towards enrichment, and I think you guys are always trying to figure that out.

And it's nice to hear that you're driving that effort for sure and helping different places that are managing horses to figure out how to do those things a little bit outside of the box. I'm thinking about with my own horses. I'm like, "Oh, I could do that there too." But we could all use the nudge and I think you do a good job nudging.

Commissioner Higbee: Thank you.

Mr. Kuechle: Miss McAlpine.

Ms. McAlpine: And I just wanted to thank Jerri and her team. I have a background in program development and evaluation and it is a really difficult job to step in, particularly when all of this is a moving target. And situations change and policies and procedures change and you're constantly reevaluating it and changing things to make better. So, thanks Jerri, and thanks all to all of your team members please too.

Ms. Bertola: Thank you, Susan. I appreciate that. One last thing, Celeste, that I'll just mention. I think I mentioned this to Susan and Dr. Lenz, but with some of our assessment process, some of our reports are delayed just because we have contractors involved. And so just to satisfy some of the requirements that our contracting folks feel we need to fulfill, sometimes the delay so that review can happen to meet our contracting needs has slowed us up on some of those. But that's the biggest change with some of our stuff. We have them. It's just it takes us a little bit longer.

And then we did complete a number of them in early December and with the holidays it's backed us up just a little bit. So that's the biggest change as far as our assessments go, just with timeframe and being able to get it out there. We still are posting them to the web as soon as we have them.

Mr. Kuechle: Susan, did you have another comment?

Ms. McAlpine: I did and that comment, Jerri; thank you; brought up the thought that you would also mention to us when you do these assessments and evaluations, you can only evaluate what you actually see. If something happens outside of your evaluation period you don't see that, so you can't include that in your assessments.

Ms. Bertola: Yes, and we have tried to draft our reports that this is an assessment of the timeframe that we are there on site. If something happens before or after it happened, before or after, hopefully our local staff is dealing with those situations. And they are, and so that's the way we have to deal with it. We cannot assess something that we did not see. So that's what we have. And we've tried to make that clear in our reporting process and just explain it's while we are there on site, either that day, those days, depending on what assessment we're doing.

Advisory Board Discussion and Wrap Up

Mr. Kuechle: Okay. Well, thank you very much. Celeste, turning it back over to you. The remainder of the time is for the Board to discuss any conclusions from today and any preparation for tomorrow.

Ms. Carlisle: All right. Well, there's a few things we can do in this very short period of time. From the presentations today, are there things that are still of concern, or the Board feels like they want to ask another question or have any follow-up comments on that we didn't quite cut to because we were jumping to something else? You might have to look back through your notes like I do. Anything? We're all good. Everybody's tired. That's my read.

Okay, then I don't think we need to absolutely use the remaining five minutes. I think we're good to take this time to do a little bit of planning for tomorrow's ... There's a few things I need from folks for our remembrance for Fred tomorrow, so I may use these few minutes to grab that from a couple people to make sure I have all in the same place. And other than that, Bryant, if you have any housekeeping and to prepare us for tomorrow, let's hear about that.

Mr. Kuechle: Okay. Yeah, so tomorrow we have another 8:00 A.M. start so we'll try to begin promptly. We'll go right into an agenda item, but then quickly at 9:00 A.M. we have our remaining public comment period. So again, those of you joining online, those slots have been filled. We have a number of people signed up to provide virtual public comment, and if you're here in person, we'll have a sign-in sheet in the morning. So just ask that you be here early in the morning so that you can get signed up and provide comment at nine o'clock. Other than that, we'll have a good evening and see everyone in the morning.

Ms. Carlisle: Thanks everybody. See you tomorrow.

Day 1 Adjourned