

THE 2008 WILD HORSE SUMMIT

October 11th and 12th, Las Vegas, Nevada

AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. INTRODUCTION.

Over 150 individuals, representing multiple wild horse groups with wide ranging expertise and experience in equine science, along with the public in general, gathered over the weekend of October 11th and 12th at the South Point Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, NV to exchange ideas, put forth proposals for solutions and provide supporting scientific documentation for many of the conclusions offered during the course of a Wild Horse Summit. The gathering was the first of its kind and came at a time when the Wild Horse and Burro Program is experiencing a national crisis. Over 33,000 wild horses are waiting in holding facilities. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced in July that euthanasia was on the table as one of the planning tools being considered to solve the problem of excess horses.

More than 80 individual comments were offered as proposed changes to existing management practices of wild horses and burros. In addition, 17 hours of taped presentations and general discussion is being reviewed and edited in an effort to provide the expertise and substance necessary to support the proposed changes as the Summit Coalition moves forward in discussions with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Wild Horse and Burro National Advisory Board, Congress and other interested parties.

This executive summary offers a brief overview of the changes and solutions proposed at the Summit and will hopefully set the stage for a more serious and extensive dialogue in the coming months.

II. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.

The strategy of the summit organizers employed a two-pronged approach: 1) to examine long term management issues and propose changes, based upon the best available science, that would get us back to the original intent of the 1971 Wild Horse and Burro Act to protect and preserve the Nation's wild horses and burros; and 2) to look at the current crisis involving the 33,000 wild horses in holding corrals across the United States and propose solutions that would effectively eliminate the need for discussion of euthanasia and put us on a course to find homes for or return wild horses to their native Herd Management Areas.

III. THE CURRENT CRISIS.

A. There are 33,000 wild horses in existing holding facilities for two primary reasons. First, we have gathered wild horses at an alarming rate, in most instances healthy horses off healthy ranges to satisfy a mythical number established as Appropriate Management Level (AML), that in turn accomplishes a larger political and economic agenda that requires, pure and simply, the removal of as many wild horses as possible. Secondly, the current adoption program has had little or no chance to succeed due to deficiencies in the marketing and media approach, the lack of a national brand to promote wild horses and failure to educate the public about wild horses.

SOLUTION: We call upon the BLM to put in place an **immediate moratorium** on future gathers until such time as a solution to the current 33,000 wild horses in holding is arrived at, adequate funding to feed and manage the wild horses in holding is made available, and the adoption program has undergone a complete transformation that puts us on a schedule to meet adoption targets that keep up with, if not exceed, any future removals of wild horses from the range. Furthermore, no removals of wild horses from existing ranges should resume until the legality of emergency removals can be thoroughly examined and changes related to herd structure, behavior and genetic viability have been implemented.

Current conservation models that house wild horses and burros, either as rescue operations or as longer term management operations, should be given priority consideration by the BLM as examples to be relied upon when contemplating administrative changes. Emerging conservation/ecotourism models, such as that proposed by Madeleine Pickens, hold great promise for the future, both in terms of addressing the current 33,000 wild horses in holding and those future horses that may come off the range that need to be placed in long term holding. We strongly encourage the BLM to make whatever administrative changes are necessary to assist existing operators and newly proposed projects to become viable under existing law.

Detailed information was presented at the Summit that identifies former wild horse Herd Management Areas as viable options for the BLM to return many of the wild horses currently in holding to the range. Approximately 19 million acres have been removed from the overall Herd Management Area allocation over a period of years for a number of reasons, according to BLM. Most of this public land is now being grazed by cattle. The Coalition calls upon BLM to return the status of those lands to wild horse designation.

IV. LONG TERM MANAGEMENT ISSUES.

The BLM has missed the mark in large degree where on-the-ground herd management practices are concerned. Through random gathers of wild horses from existing HMAs, the BLM has all but ignored the science involved in herd behavior and genetic viability. Undoubtedly, increased gathers and gathers being conducted under emergency authority in areas that are experiencing healthy range conditions and where the wild horses are in good to excellent condition, are leading to irrevocable changes in herd management structures. These changes will alter the genetic viability of those herds and preclude ability to assure their long term survival. Current evidence shows that this has already happened in many Herd Management Areas.

SOLUTION: At such time as the current crisis has been addressed and a state of stability has been established regarding the 33,000 wild horses in holding and **before** there is a resumption of gathers, we strongly encourage the BLM to sit down with representatives from the wild horse advocacy community, equine scientists, and others that possess on-the-ground knowledge of herd behavior and related topic to discuss major changes to the current practices employed in the overall management of our wild horse herds.

V. EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ABOUT OUR WILD HORSES AND BURROS.

One of the most serious deficiencies in the overall management approach of the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program has been the failure to educate the public about our wild horses and burros. Recent advances in that arena have proved, beyond a doubt, that external efforts to reach out to the general public prove highly successful. The National Mustang Heritage Foundation, a non-profit group dedicated to promoting wild horses and burros, has established the Extreme Mustang Make Over Program, and its presence in major cities throughout the western United States has produced dynamic results.

SOLUTION: We strongly encourage the BLM to continue to fund the Extreme Mustang Make Over Program, and also to **establish a database of wild horse groups** across the country and **begin a dialogue with them** to encourage new efforts along the lines of the Extreme Mustang Make Over Program. **We believe that the BLM can establish a volunteer base,** working with wild horse advocacy groups around the country and in conjunction with other civic and community organizations, to promote and engage in on-the-ground activities that further the educational outreach necessary to assist in understanding the reality of our wild horses as a valuable national resource..

VI. CONCLUSION: While we may all agree that finding a solution to the disposition of 33,000

wild horses currently standing in holding corrals in facilities all across the country may be the priority of the moment, solving that problem without also fixing the long term deficiencies in the current management strategy employed by the BLM in managing our wild horses and burros at the same time is a short-sighted approach that will only lead us back to another crisis.

The management approach that has been relied upon has been predicated, in large part, on myths generated by the livestock industry that wild horses are feral horses. Subsequent decisions on the ground are approached from the mind set that wild horses and burros should be managed as domestic livestock, rather than as a native wildlife species. The authors of the Wild Horse and Burro Act of 1971 knew that they were trying to save and protect a wildlife species that is an important part of the history of the West and a national treasure.

We firmly believe that there are valuable resources that are being ignored when it comes to managing, promoting and educating the public about our wild horses and burros. As individuals or members of wild horse advocacy groups, we call upon the BLM to engage with us to guide and assist them on a range of issues.

The Coalition looks forward to working with all interested parties with regard to the Wild Horse and Burro issue and we thank you in advance for your consideration of these summary remarks.