

## News Release

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**Contact:** Tom Gorey, BLM Public Affairs, Wash. D.C. (202-452-5137)

**Statement of the Bureau of Land Management on the Government Accountability Office's Report Titled "Effective Long-Term Options Needed to Manage Unadoptable Wild Horses" (posted at [www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov) on Monday, Nov. 10, 2008)**

The Bureau of Land Management welcomes and concurs with the findings and recommendations of the Government Accountability Office (GAO). The BLM is committed to the protection, management, and control of wild horses and burros, as mandated by the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971.

The GAO report notes that the BLM has made "significant progress" toward setting and meeting the appropriate management level (AML) of wild horse and burro herds that roam BLM-managed rangelands in 10 Western states. The bureau is committed to clarifying its guidance to field offices in establishing AML for the herds under their jurisdiction; the BLM is also committed to improving its existing direct-count method for counting animals on the range, which currently results in an undercount of the population.

The GAO report correctly depicts the difficult situation that the BLM finds itself in with regard to maintaining unadopted or unsold animals in holding facilities. These costs are spiraling out of control, accounting for three-fourths of the bureau's wild horse and burro budget of \$37 million. (Note: For further information on the budget crisis facing the BLM in managing wild horses and burros, please see: [http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/wild\\_horse\\_and\\_burro/new\\_factsheet.html](http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/wild_horse_and_burro/new_factsheet.html))

The GAO report correctly notes that the BLM has limited options for dealing with unadopted and unsold animals within its finite budget. One option is to humanely put down animals for which no adoption demand exists, as directed by the 1978 amendments to the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act; another option is to sell "without limitation" horses older than 10 and those younger that have been passed over for adoption at least three times, as directed by a December 2004 amendment to the 1971 law. The GAO recommends -- and the Department of the Interior and the BLM agree -- that the bureau should initiate discussions with Congress on addressing the BLM's noncompliance with these directives in the 1971 law, as amended.

The BLM has made no decision regarding the use of either or both of these legal options. No decision will be made until after the next meeting of the agency's National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board, which meets on November 17 in Reno, Nevada.

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