

News Release

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BLM Seeks Bids for One or More New Pasture Facilities to Care for and Maintain Wild Horses

As part of its responsibility to manage, protect, and control wild horses and burros, the Bureau of Land Management is soliciting bids for one or more new pasture facilities located anywhere in the continental United States. Each pasture facility must be able to provide humane care for and maintain at least 500 wild horses – up to as many as 2,500 – over a one-year period, with an option under BLM contract for an additional four, one-year extensions. The BLM needs additional space for wild horses placed in long-term holding facilities, all of which are currently located in Kansas, Oklahoma, and South Dakota.

"The BLM is facing tough challenges as it manages and cares for wild horses and burros both on and off public rangelands," said BLM Deputy Director Henri Bisson, who noted that herds of wild horses and burros, which have virtually no natural predators, can double in size about every four years. "As a result," Bisson said, "our agency must remove thousands of animals from the range each year to ensure that herd sizes are consistent with the land's capacity to support them. The horses and burros that must be removed but for which no adoption demand exists need to be cared for, and that's why the BLM is soliciting bids from contractors who can provide a pasture for these animals on their private ranches."

Bisson pointed out that the current wild horse and burro population roaming freely on BLM-managed lands in 10 western states – approximately 33,000 as of February 2008 – significantly exceeds what the BLM considers to be the appropriate management level. This sought-for level of about 27,300 is the number of free-roaming horses and burros that the bureau has determined can thrive on BLM-managed rangelands in balance with other rangeland resources and uses. "The BLM is working hard to achieve the appropriate management level so that healthy herds of horses and burros can thrive on healthy rangelands," Bisson said. "But with the herds' reproduction rate of about 20 percent a year, at least 6,000 horses and burros must be gathered from the range annually just to keep the free-roaming population from increasing."

Those wild horses and burros removed from the range that are not placed into private care through adoption (a one-year process) or direct sale (an immediate process) are fed and cared for at holding facilities. In the current fiscal year, holding costs are expected to exceed \$26 million, which accounts for about three-fourths of the BLM's appropriated budget for the entire wild horse and burro program. Currently there are more than 30,000 wild horses and burros maintained at holding facilities. In the case of long-term holding (pasture) facilities, unadopted and unsold horses live out the rest of their lives there. Animals are held between 10 and 25 years depending on their age when they enter lifetime holding. In contrast, only a small percentage of wild horses roaming public rangelands live past the age of 15 because of the harsher conditions.

"The BLM is committed to fulfilling its mission under the landmark Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971," Bisson said. "That means not only providing humane care to wild horses and burros, but also managing them in an ecologically and fiscally sound manner. That includes bringing the number placed through adoption or sold each year into balance with the number removed annually from the range. By achieving this balance, fewer animals will need to be maintained in holding facilities."

Details of the BLM's long-term holding facility requirements are described in solicitation NAR080108, which has been posted at <http://www.fbo.gov>. Applicants must be registered at <http://www.ccr.gov> to be considered for a contract award. The solicitation ends July 30, 2008.

For further information about the BLM's wild horse and burro program, see the agency's Internet page at www.blm.gov; for information on how to adopt a wild horse or burro, see www.wildhorseandburro.blm.gov.

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