

## Callahan Complex Draft Research – Scoping Period

### Effected Grazing Allotments

4 Grazing Allotments with 62,284 AUMs authorized for livestock use equaling 29,438 head annually.

Carico Lake, 21,905 AUMs  
11,706 Sheep 2,504 Cattle Total Head: 14,210

Grass Valley 17,701 AUMs  
2,210 Head of Cattle

JD 8,200 AUMs  
909 Cattle

Austin 14,478 AUMs  
11,040 Sheep 1,069 Cattle Total Head: 12,109

### Acreage:

Callaghan HMA Description Sheet: 156,230 acres  
Temperatures range from in excess of 100 degrees in the summer to 20 degrees below in the winter. It can take up to 25 acres to support one horse for a month.

AMLs Established for Bald Mt. through the Carico Lake RHE in 2005.

AML for Callahan-FY04-239 FY06-237  
Populations reported by NPO  
FY04-271  
FY05-454  
FY06-569  
FY07-669

FY04:  $271 + 54 = 325$  Difference: 129 60% Reproduction rate  
Based on original reported population in FY04, current population should only be 542, not 802.  
FY05:  $325 + 63 = 383$  FY06:  $383 + 77 = 460$  FY07:  $460 + 92 = 452$  FY08:  $452 + 90 = 542$   
FY07:  $669 + 138.8 = 802$

NPO reports gather occurred on 8/02. EA reports 198 would be returned, 119 were mares treated with fertility control. Only effective for one year.

FY04: 152k HMA acres

In some areas, it can take up to 25 acres to support a wild horse for a month.

Grazing Allotments: Austin, Grass Valley, 11 % of Simpson Park, BMFO began to issue a TNR for Tom and Volina Connolly but permittees withdrew application on January 16, 2008. The EA # NV-062-EA08-023, Proposed Action, pg. 15, indicates forage is temporarily available.

Grass Valley FMUD issued in 2002.

Hunt Unit 154-155

PMUD

**b. Callaghan HMA**

The AML for the Simpson Park Allotment portion of the Callaghan HMA needs to consider that the majority of the wild horse use occurs within other allotments. The portion of the HMA within the Simpson Park Allotment is utilized by livestock and provides habitat for summer mule deer range and year-long sage grouse use. Additionally, the Willow Creek and Barton Creek drainages are present within this portion of the allotment, contributing to a large percentage of the riparian resources within the Callaghan HMA.

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**PMUD- Pg. 53**

**a. Establish an Appropriate Management Level range for wild horses within the Simpson Park Allotment portion of the Callaghan Herd Management Area of 14 to 39 wild horses (166-468 AUMs). The establishment of AML for the Simpson Park Allotment as proposed would set the Callaghan HMA AML as a range of 147 to 237 wild horses (1764-2844 AUMs).**

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Wild Horses increase at an annual rate of 17.5%

FONSI June 2002 –Selected Alternative II – more release, more fertility control, less removals. Mares where 60% of the population released. ALL mares were treated with fertility control. Summer application – 1 year effectiveness. Issued under FF & Effect.

**Table 1: Comparison of Alternatives**

<b>Alternative</b>	<b>Capture Wild Horses</b>	<b>Remove Wild Horses</b>	<b>Release Wild Horses</b>	<b>Fertility Control</b>	<b>Fertility Control Mares Treated</b>
<b>Alternative I -Proposed Action</b> (Lower range of AML with fertility control)	1179	1059	120	Yes	71
<b>Alternative II</b> (Upper range of AML with fertility control)	1179	981	198	Yes	119
<b>Alternative III</b> (Lower range of AML without fertility control)	1179	1059	120	No	0
<b>Alternative IV</b> (Upper range of AML without fertility control)	1179	981	198	No	0

*1 Callaghan Herd Management Area Wild Horse Gather Plan and Environmental Assessment # NV062-02-41, May, 2002,*

From 2002 EA:

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The Proposed Action is to capture approximately 1179 wild horses within the Grass Valley allotment and Austin allotment portions of the Callaghan Herd Management Area (HMA). This would include removing approximately 1059 wild horses and conducting immunocontraceptive research on 71 mares. Approximately 120 wild horses would be returned to the HMA, which represents the lower range of the AML established through monitoring data and Multiple Use Decision. The HMA boundaries for the Callaghan HMA, and surrounding area are displayed in Map 1.

The Proposed Action also involves capturing approximately 76 wild horses from the "Cedar's Pasture" portion of the Austin allotment which is managed as a "wild horse free" area.

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To clarify, only the Austin and Grass Valley allotment portions of the Callaghan HMA (93% of the entire HMA) would be gathered, and the "Callaghan HMA" will refer to the Grass Valley and Austin allotment portions of the HMA when referencing the proposed wild horse gather in this document unless otherwise stated. The total population within this portion of the HMA is estimated to be 1179 following foaling in 2002. The total population of the entire HMA (including Simpson Park allotment) will be 1209 wild horses. Refer to Chapter III and Appendix B for more details concerning the Callaghan HMA.

## **2. Callaghan HMA**

The Callaghan HMA is located northeast of the town of Austin, Nevada and encompasses over 156,230 acres of public land. The HMA is approximately 27 miles long and 16 miles wide. The entire Callaghan HMA lies in Lander County at the north end of the Toiyabe Mountain Range. Portions of three livestock grazing allotments are included within the HMA: Austin allotment (79,969 acres, 51%), Grass Valley allotment (65,074 acres, 42%), and Simpson Park allotment (11,037 acres, 7%). Refer to Map 1, which displays the HMA and the associated allotments.

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"Cedar's Pasture", a small fenced area in the Austin allotment would be gathered. The Austin allotment FMUD, signed on January 13, 1995 designated this area as "horse-free" to be managed for zero wild horses because of the small size of the pasture, and lack of adequate water sources. Currently, there are 76 wild horses estimated to exist in the Cedar's Pasture based on the latest census conducted March 2001. None of these animals would be returned to the range and all animals would be transported to PVC for inclusion into the WH&B Adoption Program or Long Term Holding.

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The National Selection Criteria would be followed to the extent possible, however analysis of the estimated age structure of the herd reveals that only an estimated 100 wild horses captured would fall into the age category of 6-9 years old. Therefore, it is anticipated that the

The sex ratio of the wild horses captured from Callaghan HMA herd is expected to favor studs, due to the high percentage of studs released in 1997 (57% of the total released), the fact that studs tend to reflect lower mortality rates than mares, and the fact that horses that evade capture during gathers are typically studs. This indicates that the anticipated sex ratio of the Callaghan HMA will likely approximate 60% studs and 40% mares. A typical herd will approximate 50% of each. Therefore, in order to ensure that a near normal sex ratio is maintained, the goal for the gather would be to release approximately 60% mares and 40% studs.

Strangles Research pg. 9

#### **D. Strangles research data collection**

As part of ongoing strangles research conducted by Colorado State University, biological samples may be collected from wild horses captured during the gather operation.

BLM field personnel at gather sites would be responsible for identifying animals showing clinical signs of *S. equi* and/or *S. zoo* infection.

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Inoculated mares would foal normally in 2003, and the contraceptive would limit foal production in 2004. Near normal foaling rates would be expected to resume in 2005.

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#### **1. Grass Valley allotment**

Riparian Functioning Condition assessments were completed throughout the Grass Valley allotment in 1996.

- Of the 34.25 miles of the streams in the Grass Valley allotment, only 6.5 miles (19%) rated as proper functioning condition.
- Six miles (17.5%), were rated functional at-risk, trend upward.
- Nearly 22 miles (63.5%) were rated in non-functional condition.

Functioning condition assessments were also conducted on 26 acres of lentic riparian areas in the Grass Valley Allotment. Only 3 acres (11.5% ) were rated in properly functioning condition. Nearly 14 acres (52%) rated functional at risk with downward trend and 9.5 acres (36.5%) rated non-functional.

The 1979 bank cover data when compared to the 1993 data shows a downward trend for Callaghan Creek, McClusky Creek, Cowboy Rest Creek and Skull Creek.

Use pattern maps for 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992 show moderate (41-60%) to heavy/severe (61-100%) use on all riparian areas within the Grass Valley allotment, with the exception of Water Canyon (3 miles), portions of Skull (1.5 miles), and Steiner Creek (2 miles ) where steep slopes

prevent access to grazing. The level of utilization shown on the use pattern maps and for functional condition data indicate that adequate vegetation is not present to dissipate stream energy associated with high water flows.

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## **2. Austin Allotment**

Riparian Functioning Condition assessments were completed throughout the Austin allotment in 1999 and 2001.

- Of the 41.46 miles of stream surveyed, twelve miles (29%) were rated at proper functioning condition.
- Five percent (5%) were rated functioning at risk, trend upward.
- Eleven miles (27%) were rated functioning at risk, trend not-apparent.
- Twelve miles (29%) were rated functioning at risk, trend downward.
- Nearly four miles (10%) of the lotic riparian areas surveyed in the Austin Allotment were rated non-functional.

A total of 44.07 acres of lentic riparian systems were surveyed, which consist of springs and meadows. Over 76% (33 acres) of the areas surveyed were rated as properly functioning. Only 1% of the systems were rated non-functional, and 11% were rated at functional at risk with trend, upward or not apparent. Those areas rated functional at risk, downward trend totaled 12% of the areas surveyed. The majority (21 acres) of the 33 lentic acres rated at properly functioning condition consisted of exclosures or areas fenced in with private lands.

Wild horses can affect riparian areas in the same ways as livestock. However, unlike livestock, wild horses prefer open areas and generally spend less time in riparian areas. Consequently, wild horse caused resource degradation is typically associated with excessive herd numbers and/or concentrated use.

Reductions in AUMS allocated to wild horses and livestock in the Austin allotment were made in the mid-1990's, and one of the reasons for these reductions was degradation to the riparian areas within this allotment. Livestock AUMS were reduced by nearly 60%, and these reductions implemented. The AML of 35 wild horses (maximum) was also established at the time, but never achieved. The current estimated population within the allotment is 561 wild horses.

As within the Austin allotment, livestock reductions have also been made within the Grass Valley allotment. Five of the six permittees have taken various reductions averaging 30% between 1994 and 1997 through permit transfers. Appropriate Management Level has never been achieved within the Grass Valley portion of the Callaghan HMA. The current estimated population within the allotment is 618 wild horses.

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There are 5 livestock operators permitted within the Austin allotment with a total of 14, 478 Animal Unit Months (AUMs). A total of 18,277 AUMs have been suspended since 1994. Data collected and evaluated within the Austin allotment evaluation found that livestock grazing had contributed to heavy and severe utilization of key mule deer forage species, overutilization within sage grouse strutting, nesting complexes, brood rearing sites, and over utilization and degradation of riparian areas and wetlands.

There are 23 separate pastures, seedings or designated grazing areas within the Austin allotment. Permittees utilize the various areas throughout different times of the year. Both sheep and cattle are permitted within the allotment.

Six permittees utilize the Grass Valley allotment. Only two utilize the allotment within or near the HMA. Monitoring data has been collected within the allotment since 1989. Data was summarized and evaluated within the Grass Valley allotment Rangeland Health Conformance Determination signed March 6, 2002. It was determined that livestock grazing within the allotment was the casual and significant casual factors leading to RAC Standards and SERA RPS objectives not being met. Specifically, livestock had contributed to over utilization of the upland vegetation communities, riparian areas, and key mule deer browse species. Upland vegetation production was lower than potential on many sites, and key forage species were absent or markedly reduced in many of the plant communities. Many of the riparian areas were rated in non-functional condition or at risk.

Following this determination, the BMFO sought to obtain agreements with the six permittees in which changes to season of use or permitted numbers were agreed upon that would ensure significant progress was made towards meeting the Standards and objectives. Three permittees signed agreements implementing changes in management within the allotment. Decisions for the remaining three permittees were detailed within the Proposed Multiple Use Decision (PMUD) for the Grass Valley allotment, signed April 26, 2002. The FMUD is expected to be completed and released in late May, 2002. All total, permitted use within the allotment has been reduced by 7,585 AUMS or 30% of the original permitted AUMs since 1994.

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## **1. HMA Description**

The Callaghan HMA spans approximately 27 miles long and 16 miles wide and encompasses over 156,230 acres of public land. Refer to Map 1, which displays the HMA and the associated allotments. Though the HMA includes portions of three allotments, it is managed as one Herd Management Area. The Herd Management Area boundary is identical to that of the Herd Area boundary, which represents where wild horses were located at the passage of the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971. The boundary of the HMA is not fenced, except for the northern boundary where Callaghan joins Bald Mountain HMA, and at the southern end where Callaghan HMA meets the Toiyabe National Forest.

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The Callaghan HMA is *not* isolated from other HMAs, but is instead within close proximity to many other HMAs managed by the Battle Mountain Field Office. The Bald Mountain HMA joins the Callaghan HMA at the northern boundary, and is separated by only a fence. The eastern boundary of the South Shoshone HMA is located less than 8 miles northwest of Callaghan HMA. Rocky Hills HMA is located 14 miles north east of the western boundary of Callaghan HMA. Roberts Mountain HMA is located 14 miles west of the Callaghan HMA, and New Pass Ravenswood is located within five miles west, and on the other side of Highway 305.

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As a result of age selective removal criteria implemented during the 1997 gather, wild horses aged ten years old and older were released back onto the HMA. For this reason, the wild horses currently within the HMA likely reflect an age structure that is slightly skewed towards an older population when compared to typical populations. The entire HMA was not gathered at the time, and 200-300 wild horses were not captured. These wild horses would reflect a typical age structure and dilute influences to the herd through the age selective removal policy.

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The Callaghan HMA was last gathered February 6-22, 1997. The estimated population at the time of the gather was in excess of 1,800 animals based on the most recent census conducted in 1995. The gather was halted after 1,857 animals were removed from within the Callaghan and Rocky Hills HMAs due to lack of available funding to continue the gather. The Rocky Hills portion of the gather was completed. However, the Battle Mountain Wild Horse and Burro Specialist estimated that there were an additional 200 to 300 animals that had not been gathered on the Austin allotment portion of the Callaghan HMA (AML 35 wild horses).

During this gather, a total of 1412 wild horses were captured from the Callaghan HMA (299 from Austin allotment and 1113 from the Grass Valley allotment). National BLM policy mandated an age selective removal policy in which wild horses nine years old and younger be transported to Palomino Valley Corrals (PVC) for inclusion into the national adoption program. Animals ten years and older were released back to the HMA from which they were gathered. A total of 338 wild horses 10 years old and older were released back to the Callaghan HMA. Eleven animals (.59% of the total 1,857 captured during the joint gather) were euthanized or died. Only four animals (.2%) died as a direct result of the capture operation.

The Callaghan HMA was never completely gathered in 1997. Between the animals that were released, and the animals that were never captured, the population exceeded the appropriate level by an estimated 300-400 animals.

The wild horses of the Callaghan HMA are known to move back and forth between the other herd management areas. Known movement occurs between the Callaghan HMA and the Bald Mountain HMA, which borders Callaghan HMA to the north. The relationship between these two HMAs has been documented through distribution flights made of the HMAs in 1991-1993. Additionally, it is known that some of the very same English Thoroughbred stallions that are responsible for the Callaghan HMA today were also known to exist in the Bald Mountain HMA as late as 1986. The Bald Mountain and Callaghan HMAs are separated by a fence, however it is documented that wild horses from each HMA congregate at the boundary during certain periods of the year, and easily cross through gates and breaks in the fences.

Movement of the Callaghan HMA wild horses may also occur between South Shoshone HMA, Rocky Hills HMA, Roberts Mountain HMA, and until recent years, New Pass/Ravenswood.

Wild horses were witnessed running across Highway 305 from Callaghan HMA into New Pass Ravenswood HMA during the emergency fire gather of New Pass/Ravenswood HMA in 1999. The highway has since been fenced for public safety reasons, likely eliminating all but minimal movement between these HMAs.

There is no fence separating the Rocky Hills HMAs from Callaghan HMA, and movement is known to occur between these herds, and the wild horses of each to reflect similar characteristics. The Callaghan HMA herd may also enter the "Cedar's Pasture" of the South Shoshone HMA.

Fences are typically no deterrent for wild horse movement within the Battle Mountain District. Movement is mostly through gates that have been left open by hunters, and fences that are in disrepair. The wild horses are well aware of the location of the gates within the HMA, as indicated by very well defined, conspicuous trails passing through them from one area to another. Wild horses will also cross through any location where the fences are in disrepair.

Wild horses from the Callaghan HMA are known to move outside of the HMA boundaries. This activity increases as the population increases. The Callaghan HMA wild horses move outside of the boundary to the west into the lower elevation hills. It has also been well documented that the wild horses move to the east and to the south into the Bates Mountain and Rye Patch Canyon areas. The occurrence of wild horses outside of the HMA boundaries is dependant upon several factors including precipitation, time of year and primarily the population of the HMA. As the density of wild horses within an HMA increases, territorial behavior of the studs cause them to move their band to other locations to avoid confrontation with other studs and the risk of losing his mares. This type of behavior increases as competition for forage and water increase, causing wild horse bands to interact more, risking confrontation.

As a point of interest, wild horse movement of up to sixty-two miles has been recorded in another portion of the Battle Mountain District. Radio collars were put on wild horses involved with a fertility control research study in the 1980's. During a census flight several years later, one of the collared wild horses was observed 62 miles from where it had been released. The animal had crossed a highway and no less than two fences to get to where it was located during the census flight.

### 8. Current Population

The estimated population for the Austin and Grass Valley allotment portions of the Callaghan HMA following spring foaling period in 2002 will be 1179 wild horses based on the most recent census completed in March 2001. The population within the Simpson Park allotment, which will not be considered for gathering in this document, will be 31 animals (5 inside the HMA boundaries, 26 outside of the HMA boundaries). The following table displays census figures and 2002 population estimates for the Austin and Grass Valley allotment portions of the HMA. The Simpson Park allotment figures are not displayed because this portion of the HMA will not be gathered.

**Table 4: Callaghan HMA Census, March 2001 and Current Estimated Population**

CALLAGHAN HMA CENSUS SUMMARY							
ALLOTMENT	Inside HMA ADULTS	Inside HMA FOALS	Total	Outside HMA ADULTS	Outside HMA FOALS	Total	Grand Total
Austin	232	4	237	174	2	176	413
Grass Valley	437	6	443	11	1	12	455
<b>Grand Totals</b>	<b>669</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>868</b>

**Table 5. Estimated Population, Callaghan HMA**

Allotment	Estimated Population Post Foaling 2002
Austin	561
Grass Valley	618
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1179</b>

The estimated current population for the HMA was calculated by using an average annual herd increase of 17.5%. The intrinsic rate of increase among all HMAs managed by the Battle Mountain Field Office is 17.5% and is based on historic data collected during census flights and gathers. This average has been well supported throughout years of census and gathers conducted.

**NOTE:** Based on all these factors cited above, BLM assessed post-foaling population would increase populations by 311 foals. Citing a solid historical reproduction rate of 17.5%, reproduction should have only been 151.9 foals with a total population of 1,020. This population projection shows an increase of 35.8% foals and grand total populations of 159 more wild horses than their well supported reproduction rates.

**Table 6. Appropriate Management Level – Callaghan HMA<sup>5</sup>**

Allotment	Acres	Percentage	AML: Lower Limit	AML: Upper Limit
Grass Valley Allotment	65,074	42%	98	163
Austin Allotment	79,969	51%	22	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>145,043</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>198</b>

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The following summarizes what is known about the Callaghan HMA as it pertains to genetic diversity:

- The current estimated population of the Grass Valley and Austin allotment portions of the Callaghan HMA is 1179 wild horse following foaling 2002. The entire HMA including the Simpson Park allotment portion is 1209 wild horses.

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- The Callaghan HMA is not isolated from other herds (note wild horse movement discussion above).
- Callaghan HMA is in close proximity to the following HMAs with the following current estimated wild horse populations:
  - Bald Mountain: 360, South Shoshone: 479, New pass/Ravenswood: 200-400, Rocky Hills: future population of 85+, and Roberts Mountain: 156.

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The following table displays the average population size in five years and average growth rates in four years for the median trials obtained through population modeling under all four of the alternatives. For more detail, refer to Appendix C.

**Table 8, Population Modeling Averages**

Alternative	Average Population Size	Average Growth Rate
<b>Alternative I -Proposed Action</b> (Lower range of AML with fertility control)	508	19.0
<b>Alternative II</b> (Upper range of AML with fertility control)	609	20.1
<b>Alternative III</b> (Lower range of AML without fertility control)	545	23.6
<b>Alternative IV</b> (Upper range of AML without fertility control)	669	24.2

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Obvious potential impacts on horse herds and populations from exercising poor selection criteria not based on herd dynamics include modification of age or sex ratios to favor a particular class of animal. Effects resulting from successive removals causing shifts in sex ratios away from normal ranges are fairly self evident. If selection criteria leaves more studs than mares, band size would be expected to decrease, competition for mares would be expected to increase, recruitment age for reproduction among mares would be expected to decline, and size and number of bachelor bands would be expected to increase. On the other hand, a selection criteria which leaves more mares than studs would be expected to result in fewer and smaller bachelor bands, increased reproduction on a proportional basis with the herd, lengthening of the time after birth when individual mares begin actively reproducing, and larger band sizes.

The susceptibility of the older herd to extreme climatic events would depend on the age of the dominant class in the group. Generally, survival rates of horses are very high (exceeding 98%) for mature animals and lower for very young. This survivability declines again at some older age. Similarly, reproductive success also declines at some age. The threshold age at which susceptibility to extreme events and reproductive senescence occurs has not been established. It is reasonable to conclude that the older the population, the more prone it would be to a catastrophic die-off as a result of reduced resistance to disease, lowered body condition, and/or reduced reproductive capacity.

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Up to 90% of the mares treated with PZP would not foal in 2005.

NOTE: Discussions and figures for population modeling of the alternatives consistently cited reproduction occurring at much higher rates than BMFO stated was a well-documented rate of 17.5%. Population modeling resulted in a recruitment range up to 32% if BLMs "Proposed Action" (gathering to low AML with fertility control) was not implemented, nearly twice as high as prior research documented.

FY04-424  
FY05-270  
FY06-302  
FY07-338

NPO records report no gather occurring since July 1981 as of FY05 nor had AML been reached. AML was adjusted downward between FY05-FY06, no gather reported but population declined 154 wild horses. As of FY07, NPO still fails to report any gather occurring despite population decline between FY04-05.

FY04: 139k HMA acres

Grazing Allotments: Carico Lake

Carico Lake Allotment issued a grazing closure notice in 12/07 to be effective 3/08. No suspension of AUMs was authorized.

From first initial scoping document on Bald Mt.

Scoping document dated 4/11/06 states latest census (March 2005) indicates 338 wild horses.

So. Shoshone/Bald Mt. Gather Plan estimates 379 in Bald Mt. States a 12% reproduction increase was applied to both the HMA populations.

From So. Shoshone/Bald Mt Gather Plan

The Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) for both HMAs were established within the Final Multiple Use Decision (FMUD) for the Carico Lake Allotment, signed September 30, 2005. The proposed gather operation would be limited to 100 horses per year.

The Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) for both HMAs were established through the Final Multiple Use Decision (FMUD) issued by the BMFO September 30, 2005 following completion of the Carico Lake Allotment Evaluation and Rangeland Health Assessment and EA #NV062-EA05-61. The AML for the Austin Allotment portion of the HMA was established at zero wild horses in a 1995 FMUD.

Rocky Hills-AML FY04-123 AML-FY05-143

FY04-114  
 FY05-93  
 FY06-109  
 FY07-128

NPO records indicate no gather has occurred since November 1999. 2001 was cited as when AML was reached. Yet populations were reported as declining between FY04 and FY05. As of FY07, no gather has been reported as occurring since 1999.

FY04: 81k HMA acres  
 FY06: 81k HMA acres

Grazing Allotments: JD and Grass Valley

**Rocky Hills & Simpson Park**

There is no Simpson Park HMA. They removed wild horses existing outside HMA boundaries that had just wandered into the Simpson Park Mountains.

**Location/Habitat**

The Rocky Hills Herd Management Area (HMA) is, located 54 miles southwest of Elko, Nevada, in Eureka County. The area consists of 83,998 acres, and is 15 miles wide and 13 miles long. It encompasses the Rocky Hills and Simpson Park Mountains.

From the 1999 Gather EA of Rocky Hills  
 EA# NV062-EA00-03

Burned Area Wild Horse Removal Rocky Hills, New Pass/Ravenswood and Simpson Park Mountains

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Total Acres Burned	Herd Management Area Affected	Acres of HMA	Acres of HMA burned	% of HMA burned	Grazing Allotments involved
106,611	Rocky Hills	84,347	39,759	47%	JD Ranch 3 Bars Underwood Grass Valley Santa Fe Fergusen

pg. 4

The Trail Canyon fire burned up to and around all of the water sources within the Rocky Hills HMA. Through rehabilitation efforts, these burned areas would be fenced, thus blocking wild horse access to the water sources. Many of the water sources, and most of the land area used by the wild horses during the winter months within the New Pass Ravenswood HMA burned in the Antelope/New Pass wildfire. Rehabilitation fencing of the Antelope/New Pass burn would block normal patterns of wild horse movement across the New Pass/Ravenswood HMA. This would deny access by wild horses to sources of feed and water during periods of heavy snowfall. Rehabilitation fencing may also fence wild horses within the burned areas, where a lack of forage could lead to starvation and death. Field observations have reported wild horses moving outside of the boundaries of both HMAs to find unburned forage. Reports also state that wild horses are going back into the burned areas to use the water sources. It is for the above reasons that all of the horses must be removed from these HMAs until the burned areas have recovered.

Approximately 500 horses need to be removed from the New Pass/Ravenswood HMA. This figure includes those horses on the Carson City Field Office portion of the HMA.

The estimated number of horses needed to be removed from the Rocky Hills HMA is 225, and approximately 100 horses would be gathered from the Simpson Park Mountains.

pg. 6

**Proposed Action**

The proposed action(s) would: (1) allow the range to recover after a devastating wild fire, (2) prevent further deterioration of the range not affected by the wildfire but now threatened by an overpopulation of wild horses, (3) allow the BLM to remove wild horses currently residing outside a designated HMA in accordance with 43 CFR 4710.4, and (4) ensure the health, well being and safety of the wild horses.

**New Pass/Ravenswood HMA:** All of the wild horses within this HMA would be gathered and shipped to PVC with the exception of 20-30 horses in the southern portion of the HMA that would not be gathered or removed. This band of horses has inhabited this area for many years and has access to year round supplies of forage and water. PVC would make the determination of which animals would enter the adoption program, and which animals would be shipped to a wild horse sanctuary or other facility.

**Rocky Hills HMA:** All of the wild horses within this HMA would be gathered and shipped to PVC during the capture operation. PVC would make the determination of which animals would enter the adoption program, and which animals would be shipped to a wild horse sanctuary or other facility.

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This HMA is in close proximity to the Bald Mountain, Callaghan, and Roberts Mountain HMAs, and mixing among the herds is likely. The Grass Valley allotment comprises 31.3% of the HMA, and the JD Ranch allotment 68.9%.

**New Pass/Ravenswood HMA**

The New Pass/Ravenswood HMA is located approximately 35 miles northwest of Austin, Nevada, in Lander County, and covers 225,000 acres. The Gilbert Creek allotment comprises approximately 73% of the HMA, and the Manhattan Mountain allotment comprises approximately 18%. Clan Alpine allotment comprises approximately 8% and Mt Airy/New Pass allotments 1% of the HMA.

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**New Pass/Ravenswood HMA**

Gilbert Creek Allotment  
Manhattan Mountain Allotment

**Rocky Hills HMA**

Grass Valley Allotment  
JD Ranch Allotment

**Simpson Park Mountains (not designated as an HMA or HA)**

Three Bar Allotment  
Underwood Allotment  
Grass Valley Allotment  
Dry Creek Allotment  
Santa Fe Ferguson Allotment  
Simpson Park Allotment

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**Wild Horses**

**Rocky Hills HMA**

The last aerial census of the Rocky Hills HMA was conducted September 1998. At that time 182 wild horses were counted within the HMA. The current estimated population is 214.

The most recent gather took place in February of 1997, in the Grass Valley allotment portion of the HMA. The gather was completed in conjunction with the Callaghan HMA gather. Of the 445 horses gathered from the Rocky Hills HMA, 333 were shipped to Palomino Valley north of Sparks, Nevada for processing into the adoption program. The remaining 112 horses, ages 10 to 25 years of age, were released back into the HMA.

The horses in the Rocky Hills HMA are relatively large in size, with some animals reaching 17 hands high. During the last gather, paint and appaloosa horses were captured, in addition to those that were brown, bay, black, red roan, buckskin, chestnut and grulla (mouse colored).

The AML for the Grass Valley allotment and JD Ranch portion of the HMA will be established through a future interdisciplinary evaluation. Until that time, the Interim Herd Size established in the Land Use Plan for the Grass Valley allotment portion is 38 horses; and the JD Ranch allotment portion is 93 horses.

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#### **New Pass/Ravenswood HMA**

A census of the Battle Mountain Field Office portion of the New Pass/Ravenswood HMA has not been conducted since the last gather in 1994. Attempts were made in both 1998 and 1999 to census the area, however, the airspace could not be de-conflicted with the military. The current estimated population is 373 horses. The Carson City Field Office estimates the population of the CCFO portion at 50-95 horses.

The last wild horse gather was conducted by the BMFO from August 19 through August 26, and October 21-30, 1994. The first portion of the gather was stopped because of extremely dry weather conditions and intolerable dust which was deemed detrimental to the horses. The second half of the gather began after the area received some precipitation. During this gather 444 horses were captured from the New Pass/Ravenswood HMA. Only 221 of the horses captured were shipped to Palomino Valley north of Sparks, Nevada for processing into the adoption program. The remaining 223 horses, ages 6 to 22 years old, were released back inside the HMA from which they were captured.

The horses within the HMA include bay, brown, sorrel, gray, black, grulla (mouse colored), palomino, roan, buckskin, chestnut, appaloosa, and pinto. Appropriate Management Level of 476 horses has been established for this HMA through the Multiple Use Decision process.

Field observations have found the wild horses scattered across the area both inside and outside of the HMA. Several bunches have been observed along Highway 305 outside of the HMA. Over 300 horses have recently been observed in the Manhattan Mountain area. Numerous bands have been observed in the vicinity of Big George and Little Antelope Springs which are within the burned area. The horses are using these springs for water, then travelling outside of the burn to forage. A great deal of activity is being observed within the burned area.

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#### **Wild Horses**

**Proposed Action** - Approximately 825 horses could be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action would cause increased stress and a disruption of their daily lives. Field observations indicate that the horses are in good health, however, the remaining forage would not last long at the current level of wild horse use.

**Sex:** Mare **Age:** 8 Years **Height (in hands):** 14.2  
**Necktag #:** 5385 **Date Captured:** 12/02/05  
**Color:** Gray **Captured:** Outside an HMA-NV

**Sex:** Mare **Age:** 5 Years **Height (in hands):**  
**Necktag #:** 5331 **Date Captured:** 11/30/05  
**Color:** Brown **Captured:** Outside an HMA

**Sex:** Mare **Age:** 2 Years **Height (in hands):**  
**Necktag #:** 5031 **Date Captured:** 11/28/05  
**Color:** Buckskin **Captured:** Outside an HMA

**Notes:**

#5031- 2 yr old Buckskin Mare-Captured Nov 28, 2005 outside Simpson Park Range in Eureka County, NV.

**Number of Bids:** 1

**Winning bid:** \$125.00

**High Bidder:** AR3184

5-29-07

**Sex:** Gelding **Age:** 3 Years **Height (in hands):** 13.2  
**Necktag #:** 5319 **Date Captured:** 12/05/05  
**Color:** Chestnut **Captured:** Outside an HMA

**Notes:**

#5319 - 3 yr old chestnut gelding captured Dec 5, 2005 in the Simpson Park Mtns. near Eureka, NV. He is approachable.

**Sex:** Mare **Age:** 3 Years **Height (in hands):** 13.2  
**Necktag #:** 5451 **Date Captured:** 12/05/05  
**Color:** Buckskin **Captured:** Outside an HMA

**Notes:**

#5451 - 3 yr old buckskin mare, captured Dec 5, 2005 outside of Simpson Park Mtns. near Eureka, NV. She is approachable.

“We interpret the term AML within the context of the statute to mean to mean that ‘optimum’ number of wild horses which results in a thriving natural ecological balance and avoids a deterioration of the range” (109 IBLA 119 API 1989). The upper range of the AMLs established for the HMA within the Complex represent the maximum population for which thriving natural ecological balance would be maintained. The lower range represents the number of animals to remain in the Complex following a wild horse gather in order to allow for an anticipated four-year gather cycle, and prevent the population from exceeding the established AML between gathers. “Proper range management dictates removal of horses before the herd size causes damage to the

range land. Thus, the optimum number of horses is somewhere below the number that would cause resource damage” (118 IBLA 75).

In Simpson Park Complex RHE, the Hickson HMA was discussed. The NV Grazing Allotment Map shows no Hickson HMA.

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The populations of wild horses north of Highway 50 fluctuate throughout the year based on seasonal distribution throughout Simpson Park Allotment. The March, 2005 census revealed a total of 45 wild horses at that time. The average number of horses utilizing the portion of the Hickson HMA north of Highway 50 is expected to be influenced by a combination of precipitation levels (horse distribution is influenced by an increased influx of snow at higher elevations), forage and water availability. In the portion of the HMA south of Highway 50, there exists a single horse.

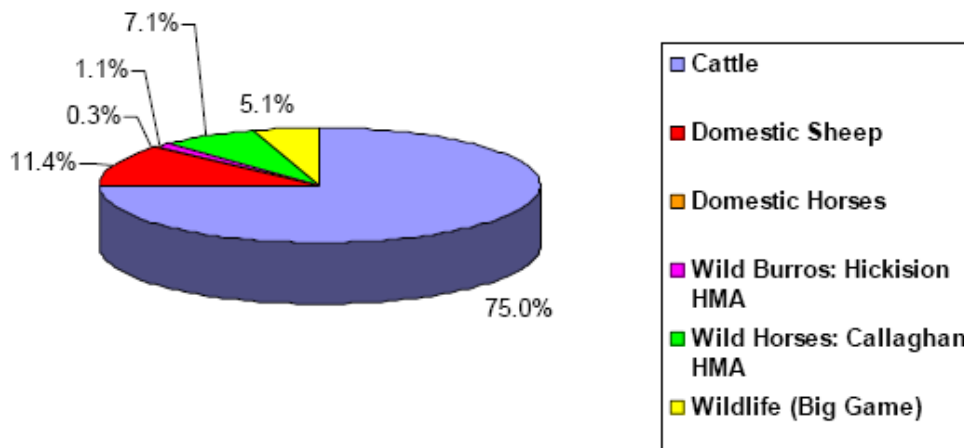
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Food habit studies for the shrub-steppe biome show that percent composition of diets averaged 63% for shrubs, 29% for forbs, and 7% for grasses.

### b. Simpson Park Allotment

The following figure and table summarizes the historical and existing authorized use within the Simpson Park Allotment based on permitted livestock AUMs and RPS initial management objectives.

Figure 1: Existing Authorized Use Levels from the RPS for all uses in the Simpson Park Allotment



**DECISION:**

Based on the rationale below, this constitutes my final decision to gather and remove excess wild horses and burros from the Simpson Park Range. Pursuant to Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations at 4770.3(c), the Simpson Park Range gather is approved for implementation upon the date of my signature below. Gather operations will begin on November 1, 2005.

FONSI was signed 11/7/05

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