

There are two areas that need to be addressed and made part of the public record.

The first is the Bureau of Land Management's Las Vegas Field Office's response and involvement with the community and its citizens. The second is the actual wild horse and burro gather proposal itself. Both areas have serious concerns, flaws, and problems that make the entire proposal and process that has led up to this assessment extremely questionable and even outrageous.

The issue of "community involvement" needs to be addressed first since it has bearing on the proposals offered in this environmental assessment.

On July 8, 2006, the Las Vegas Review Journal published an article regarding the Bureau of Land Management's announcement and initiation of a public scoping period concerning gather proposals for the wild horses and burros in the Southern Nevada/Las Vegas area.

The article addressed removal numbers within the affected areas, wildlife concerns about the current over-population of wild horses and burros as well as a general explanation of the BLM's mission to oversee multiple-use resources and the maintenance of "thriving ecological balance" among those resources.

This article also quoted Las Vegas Field Office Assistant Field Manager Karla Norris as saying "We are seeking scientific input, not emotional" in regards to the upcoming proposal.

Until that article, I had assumed, as many assume, that the wild horses and burros of our area were being responsibly managed and that BLM was "taking care of business", as they have been charged to do. I therefore had no knowledge of the wild horse and burro program, no idea what an environmental assessment was, didn't know what an HMA was, in essence, didn't know anything at all about any of it. But those removal numbers bothered me so much, that I decided that I could look into it, even if it was just a little bit.

I must first state that, if there are things within this proposal, administration or management by the Las Vegas Field Office that I don't understand, it is not from lack of intense trying. I have been single-minded and unrelenting in my focus to gather and investigate the relevant data and multiple-issues required for comprehension on this subject.

As many BLM personnel can now attest to, I have consistently and aggressively pursued information on a daily basis, trying to learn, ask questions, read reports, scoured the websites, contact a wide variety of others involved in wild horse and burro issues, made phone calls, e-mails, and have written letters, all in an effort to understand and be informed on this issue with the sole purpose of being able to provide "meaningful public involvement".

This has resulted in a great irony. The more I looked at the numbers, read the reports and contacted various individuals within the BLM and associative agencies with questions about the program, the more emotional I have become.

While I freely confess that there may still be issues, facts, data, etc. that I am unaware of, it is only through the unwillingness of some BLM personnel to share, through their omissions, and in my opinion, deliberate attempts at deception and sabotage, that have prevented me from becoming fully knowledgeable and prepared to examine the proposals and offer “scientific input”.

BLM and similar agencies hold a monopoly on the information of the affected areas, environmental factors, rangeland data, and various issues that influence the multiple-use applications that are considered in these proposals. To acquire it, it must be acquired through them and they have been none to willing to share or report this information to the public.

The first phone conversation I ever had with Jerrie Bertola, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist for the Las Vegas Field Office, seemed to be a good one. We talked for over a half hour as she explained basic information about the wild horses and burros, the area, the problems, and the needs. She told me that she would send me stuff that was “laying around the office” about the area and the proposals but at no time did she request my mailing address to send this information to me. After we hung up, she e-mailed me requesting my mailing address, which I then provided. This was late Friday afternoon and by Monday morning, Jerrie was “out of the office” for the next week. Though she e-mailed me stating that she would send me “stuff”, I never received any mailed information from Jerrie, ever.

Through the course of various telephone conversations, I was first told that while there is plenty of land and forage “out there” but the key issue was a lack of water. Later, I was told it was not water so much as the fact that the water sources were located too close together, thereby causing excessive soil compaction and trammeling effects associated with the over-population of wild horses and burros. Now, according to this environmental assessment, there seems to be an emphasis on lack of viable forage resulting in poor body condition scores in both wild horses and burros in all the areas, which is resulting in consumption of food that contains “toxin tannins” posing a threat to their health.

In one of these phone conversation during the scoping period, I had asked Jerrie how I was suppose to provide input without having any information about the area to consider. She responded that, while she could understand the dilemma, there really wasn’t anything she could offer to help.

Now I know better. She could have told me about the environmental assessments done less than a year ago that did a rangeland analysis of these areas, or the environmental assessment that determined new appropriate management levels, or the new land use plans, amendments and proposals. She could have directed me to wildlife studies in the area, wilderness study proposals, USFS general management plans; in other words, there was a lot of information she could have directed me too but did not. Why?

After patiently waiting and occasionally checking on status of when was the “stuff laying around the office” was going to arrive, I finally grew frustrated at the lack of response and e-mailed Karla Norris, the Assistant Field Manager to both complain and request some sort of documentation about the upcoming proposal.

It was at this juncture that Karla informed me that as of two weeks ago, she had been transferred to another department within the field office and was no longer involved in the wild horse and burro program but with SNLMPA. She then referred me to Susie Stokke, Nevada Wild Horse and Burro Lead Program Director.

This was a logical connection since I was interested in a broad spectrum of information to help me learn about the program, regulations and requirements of BLM and their role in the maintenance of wild horse and burros. Susie was able to provide a wide variety of information that was of assistance, as well as being more available for communication because of her position.

However, putting me in contact with a more appropriate person did not justify lying about her continued involvement and oversight. As time passed, it turned out that Karla “never left” the wild horse and burro proposals. She continued to sign all the paperwork and when questioned about it at the Pahrump meeting, she stated that “she never left”. This means that she merely didn’t want to be bothered with actually communicating or answering questions about this proposal. It is my understanding that she is now replying to people via e-mail that “she is the wrong person to contact” and therefore no comments submitted to her will be counted within the context of “public comments of this proposal”.

There is also the fact that, according to this environmental proposal, no e-mail submissions will be accepted or counted as part of the public comment, only postal submissions. A petition created by the residents of Cold Creek during the initial scoping period in July that has been circulating since and that the Las Vegas Field Office has had full knowledge of, will also only be counted as one comment, per a Las Vegas Field Office decision.

The two “local” meetings that were scheduled were the result of consistent pressure by the residents of Cold Creek, who asked for at least two months about BLM providing an opportunity to the citizens to hear and discuss the proposal.

While BLM sent letters out to the people on the “interested party” list announcing these meetings, almost no media or press releases were issued to involve anyone else. I contacted the Pahrump Valley Times the day before the printing of the last newspaper that would be “timely” notification of the meeting, requesting that the meeting place and time be printed. I was informed by the editor that only the BLM could make that announcement. So, I contacted the BLM late that afternoon asking that they issue a press release before 10:00 tomorrow as well as asking if they had placed a notice in any other publication to notify people of these meetings. While they did get the press release in on time, they never responded back to me to let me know if they made the deadline or not, or if they had released information in any other publication in the areas. I know they made the deadline because the editor informed me, not BLM. As to whether any other notices or press releases in any other publications to inform the public where published, I don’t know.

With regard to these two meetings, they were scheduled in very remote locations that caused us to drive over two hours just to attend. Many of the people I talked to in Las Vegas about possibly attending couldn't afford to take out the four or five hours required for both the drive and the meeting.

When I asked BLM why they didn't schedule a meeting in Las Vegas too, where the one million plus people live, they responded that they had complaints from the rural communities about lack of access. But the questions remains, why didn't BLM scheduled THREE meetings so that everyone could get an opportunity to participate? What is so crushing about the time schedule that BLM couldn't include one more meeting in the area where the largest population resides?

Furthermore, the Pahrump meeting was scheduled concurrently with the regularly scheduled monthly Pahrump Townhall Meeting. The Townhall Meeting was at the Bob Rudd Community Center on the same street as the Senior Center, where the BLM meeting was scheduled. The Community Center had easy access (right off the main highway), was brightly lit, easy to find and with plenty of parking. The Senior Center was several miles down the road, no sign, no light, and obscured by trees. I drove past it three times and finally had to ask directions as to its location before I found it. Because I arrived early to the BLM meeting, I drove back to the Townhall Meeting to hand out flyers and ended up giving directions to two people who were also trying to find the Senior Center.

So how many people couldn't find the Senior Center and gave up? We will never know. How many people could have/would have attended a Las Vegas meeting? We will never know and the reason we won't know is because BLM discouraged and sabotaged public involvement and participation at every turn.

I personally had made copies of the two previously released relevant environmental assessments about the rangeland evaluation and new AML's for the Herd Management Areas that this gather proposal covers. I brought them to the Pahrump BLM meeting so that the people in attendance could easily access them without waiting for months to acquire them like I had to do. When I asked if I could set them on the table so people could take them if they wanted to, I was told no. Why?

These were just BLM environmental assessments about the proposed area. I openly and freely showed you that they were just your reports. Why didn't you allow them to be distributed? It didn't even cost you anything and they contained nothing that you yourself had not printed. Why wouldn't you allow the people at the meeting to access these documents? Why did I have to give them out in the parking lot after the meeting instead of in full view of the BLM? What did you think was wrong with trying to provide your information about your proposals to the public?

There is even one person that I know that submitted comments during the initial scoping period, who specifically requested that they be put on the interested party list on all future proposals, and yet never was mailed an this EA. BLM claims it was an oversight. How many other

“oversights” have happened that resulted in interested members of the community not receiving this proposal? Or the EA in December 2005 that set new AML numbers? Or the rangeland assessment proposal done in September 2005?

Perhaps its not that the public and community isn't interested in the wild horse and burro program, it's that they are never informed about the proposals. Or maybe its because their comments, letters, petitions, questions, and concerns are “not counted”, or we fail to meet newly created BLM public comment guidelines, or we can't find their way to the meetings, or can't get BLM personnel to call us back or mail us information that they said they would, or we don't get an opportunity to hear what anyone else has to say or may know about the area or the proposals, or BLM won't release relevant reports, studies or data about the proposals, or that no press releases are provided unless under great public pressure to inform anyone that might want to know and participate.

