

June 19, 2003

Dear Interested Party:

The Billings Field Office (BiFO) has developed the Decision Record (DR) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), describing the Bureau of Land Management's decision to support the FY2003 Humane-use of Fertility Control on Yearling Mares, Two-Year Old Mares and Mares 14 Years of Age and Older and Selective Removal of Young Wild Horse Stallions, on the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range (PMWHR). This document is available at <http://www.mt.blm.gov/bifo/whb/doc2.html> or by contacting BiFO. The proposed actions were described in Environmental Assessment #MT-010-03-14. This document was released for a 30-day comment period, and BLM received 69 response letters and email. Attachment 1, in the Decision Record, provides a summary of public input and BLM responses.

The proposed time frame for the fertility control efforts is July 28 to September 28, 2003. Based on previous efforts, remote-delivery of the PZP vaccine should happen successfully for the majority of the selected mares within the first 2 weeks of darting activity. The proposed time frame allows sufficient opportunity for the delivery of booster shots that must be given about one month following the initial primer shot. At this time, there are a total of 24 mares proposed for this program (7 yearling fillies, 9 two-year old fillies and 8 fourteen years of age and older mares). Please see Figure 1 in the Decision Record.

Fertility control provided in the summer of 2003 will impact 2004 pregnancies only. No additional mares will be added to this 2003 program; however, additional mares may be lost due to natural mortality. The beginning of remote-delivery activities will be communicated to the public via timely press releases or information can be obtained by contacting BiFO.

The proposed time frame for the gather is September 8 to September 12, 2003. The available budget will allow a maximum of 4 days of helicopter effort. The PMWHR herd size is currently at 191 horses including 22 surviving foals and 9 missing animals. At least another 10 foals are expected this year. Gather efforts will be maximized at 13 young male stallions (5 yearlings, 5 two-year olds, 3 four-year olds) and no more than 50% of the existing age classes. Please see Figure 1 in the Decision Record. This action is necessary in order to reduce the herd to a size that would not negatively impact its genetic viability in the short term or cause irreparable harm to the range.

Gather efforts will be determined by opportunities for animal access as well as safety and humane considerations. It is likely that capture efforts will be concentrated on the Park Service Dryhead herd area as well as other lower elevations of the range. Some temporary trapping efforts may take place in the upper elevations of the horse range as well. It is expected that impacts to other wildlife will be minimal and that any range closures will be temporary and limited in nature. Efforts on the Park Service will be closely coordinated with Park Service personnel and will not involve closures. Any and all activities will

be communicated to the public via timely press releases or information can be obtained by contacting BiFO. Culmination of the gather effort, with an organized oral competitive-bid adoption, is scheduled for Saturday, September 27, 2003 at the BLM Britton Springs Administrative Site, near Lovell, Wyoming.

A public hearing, regarding the use of helicopters in the gather, will be held on Thursday, June 26, 2003 (7 pm) at the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area Visitor Center, in Lovell, Wy.

Any person who feels adversely affected by this decision may file an appeal to the Interior Board of Land

Appeals, Office of the Secretary. Please refer to section X. APPEALS of the DR/FONSI for information regarding procedures for appeal.

Thank you for your interest in the PMWHR. If you have questions concerning the DR/FONSI, please contact Linda Coates-Markle, State Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, at (406) 896-5013.

Sincerely,

Sandra S. Brooks
Field Manager