



To: Joint Agriculture Committee

From: Beth Callaway, Senior Policy Advisor to Governor Mark Gordon

Date: May 20, 2022

Re: HEA 45 Wild Horse & Burro Management Update

Thank you for the invitation to testify at the June 6-7th Joint Agriculture meeting regarding wild horse management. We regret that our office is unable to attend the discussion in person. The following is an update on efforts underway by the Governor's Office regarding wild horse management in the state.

Since the passage of HEA 45 during the 2022 legislative session, the Governor's Office has primarily focused on developing a plan for the use of the \$500,000 appropriation. We expect to have a final plan and cooperative agreements executed in time for the fall Joint Agriculture meeting. More details on the draft arrangements are below. Concurrently, we are conducting the Governor's Consistency Review for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Wild Horse Final Environmental Impact Statement and proposed Rock Springs and Rawlins Resource Management Plan (RMP) amendments. A response is due to the BLM by July 5th.

Governor Gordon recognizes that Wyoming's wild horse populations on federal lands have long exceeded Appropriate Management Levels (AML) prescribed by the BLM. The current situation is ecologically unsustainable, and not only threatens the continued existence of the wild horses, but wildlife and multiple-use of our public lands as well. While wild horses are jurisdictionally a federal endeavor, the Governor is committed to exploring solutions for wild horse management that entail a full suite of tools that can be used in tandem with one another to optimize their effectiveness. This includes gathers, fertility controls, off-range holding, and the like. Employing truly effective population management solutions will necessitate a change in the current paradigm by all involved. That means a shift to fully leveraging public and private partnerships in concert with existing federal programs.

Today's efforts to identify projects for funding under HEA 45 are a first step toward utilizing some of the cooperative tools in the toolbox that, in concert with all that are available, set the groundwork for comprehensive cooperative wild horse management. This includes the removal and relocation of wild horses, contracts with third parties to secure lower-cost leasing of land for long-term humane care of removed horses and burros, the application of proven, safe and humane population growth suppression strategies to prevent repeated gathers, and promotion of adoptions in order to reduce captive populations and costs.

Project #1: Tribal gathers – \$400,000 through 2023

Purpose: The Wind River Reservation grazing lands encompass approximately 1.8 million acres of tribal trust land. These are truly feral horses as they are not descendants of the wild mustangs and have caused severe overgrazing in upland range and riparian habitats, altering plant composition, degrading water quality and severely outcompeting native wildlife like bighorn sheep, mule deer, antelope, elk, and moose. Additionally, excessive numbers of feral horses on grazing lands directly compete with preferred grasses and forbs that are typically used by permitted cattle.

The primary goal is to partner with the Tribes on an effort they will lead for the removal of nearly all feral horses from the highest populated areas on the Wind River Reservation. The secondary goal is to leave a remnant herd of free-ranging feral horses in the northern range for aesthetic purposes. The tertiary goal is to continue annual removals to maintain feral horse abundance within Appropriate Management Levels (AML). Removal in any given year will depend upon the amount of funding available.

Objectives:

1. Remove horses in the highest density areas on the reservation.
2. Determine AMLs and areas to maintain a segment of free-ranging feral horses.
3. After primary removal, managing free-ranging feral horses to AML. Grazing utilization will be monitored post-horse removal.

Initial assessment of a horse gather involves the review of the site topography and accessibility for haul trucks and/or trailers that haul feral horses from traps to the working pens. After the initial assessment is complete, the actual roundup phase would commence.

Proposed Budget:*

- Capture and Sort (using professional helicopter gather contractor) – \$250/head x 1,500 \$375,000
- Brand Inspection \$20/head x 1500 \$30,000
- Veterinary \$5/head x 1500 – \$7,500
- Hay 30 ton at \$350 – \$10,500
- Wages/Fuel/Security 4 Wardens – \$37,000
- Shipping Feed and water – \$20,000
- Incidentals Repair/Replacement of equipment – \$20,000

- Total \$500,000

*Note that the Governor's Office is working with the Tribes to adjust the final figure to roughly \$400,000 so as to work within the \$500,000 HEA45 appropriation budget.

Project #2 – Wyoming Honor Farm program assistance – \$100,000 through 2023

Purpose: The Wyoming Honor Farm (WHF) assists with the long term management of the wild horse population by housing and training horses removed from public lands by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Inmates are selected and trained to work with these animals, under the supervision of WHF employees. Twice per year the WHF hosts auctions to sell and find homes for the horses trained by the inmates.

Objective:

The proposed funding is for training and corrals that will allow the WHF to continue to safely and successfully manage our wild horse population by ensuring staff and inmates alike are well trained in horsemanship techniques. Finding homes for the horses through these adoptions in the long run, is good for the horse, the inmate and the management of the wild horse population. By and large, all the horses in the auction are sold.

In order for the WHF to continue this work, it is important that WHF corrals and pens meet BLM standards. The BLM has specific requirements for the Wild Horse and Burro Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program (CAWP) and will likely involve a formal audit; noncompliance could impact the number of horses in the program and WHF's ability to impact the overall wild horse population.

Proposed Budget:

- Horsemanship training and equipment for staff and inmates: \$70,000
- Fencing pipe for corrals, paddocks and pens: \$30,000
- The total request is \$100,000