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PLC: BLM is Wrong to Re-evaluate Wild Horse Gather Decision

WASHINGTON (June 21, 2011) – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released on June 13, 2011, an environmental assessment and decision record to implement a wild horse gather and fertility control program on the White Mountain and Little Colorado Herd Management Areas (HMAs) in Wyoming to bring the horse populations back to a level consistent with land capacity. However, [Public Lands Council](http://www.beef.org) (PLC) President John Falen said it is extremely concerning that BLM has since backtracked and announced it is re-evaluating the decision.

“The public comment period closed in May and the final decision to allow a gather was finalized. Why is BLM reopening its decision now?” Falen asked. “It appears the agency has decided to disregard science and its own environmental assessment to once again bow to animal rights extremists.”

PLC submitted comments on BLM’s draft horse management plan in September 2010 and specifically raised concerns with proposed reductions in gathers allowed in 2011 and the inevitable expansion of HMAs. Falen said BLM’s refusal to follow statute to manage wild horse populations at appropriate levels has damaging effects on the land, the wild horses, other wildlife and livestock grazing on the lands.

Falen said under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, BLM is required to manage wild horse populations at appropriate management levels (AML). According to BLM, the maximum AML on the White Mountain and Little Colorado HMAs is 400 horses. However, BLM estimates the current population is nearly 1,000 horses. Falen said these population levels, unfortunately, are consistent with wild horse population levels across the West. BLM estimates the AML on the range to be 26,000. There are now more than 38,000 wild horses in the West.

“BLM made the right decision to implement a gather. Horse populations are already 250 percent higher on the White Mountain and Little Colorado HMAs than the maximum appropriate management level established by BLM,” Falen said. “Public lands ranchers support management at levels based on the range’s capability of accommodating horses and burros for the health of both the animals and the range. Re-evaluating and potentially changing their decision jeopardizes the horses and the natural resources on and around the HMAs.”

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