

**Northwest Colorado Stewardship (NWCOS)  
Wild Horse Meeting  
July 21, 2005  
Meeting Summary**

**Action Items**

Brad Petch	Share data and his views on wildlife situation in Sandwash Basin with group. Send this to Helen for distribution ( <a href="mailto:hlittrell@keystone.org">hlittrell@keystone.org</a> ).
Toni Moore and Valerie Dobrich	Share with each other and compare data on where horses have been seen historically and their habitat needs as soon as possible.
Toni Moore	Prepare comments on concerns about how the word “range” is used in the alternatives document and send to Helen Littrell at Keystone for distribution ( <a href="mailto:hlittrell@keystone.org">hlittrell@keystone.org</a> ).

**Attendance**

Curtis Bryan, Jimmie Dearman, Valerie Dobrich, Barb Flores, John Husband, Lisa Irvin, Ginger Kathrens, Andrea Minor, Toni Moore, Brad Petch, Steve Raftopoulos, Luke Schafer, Hunter Seim, Liz Twomey, Jane Yazzie, Kristi Parker Celico, and Heather Bergman.

**Agenda Items**

- Review of Current Status of Wild Horse Issues for the Little Snake Resource Area
- Public Discussion of Biggest Concerns Regarding Wild Horses
- Public Discussion of What’s Working with Current Policy
- Review of Resource Management Plan (RMP) Process and Northwest Colorado Stewardship (NWCOS) Role
- Review of Draft RMP Alternatives for Wild Horses
- Review of Next Steps

**Review of Current Status of Wild Horse Issues for the Little Snake Resource Area**

Valerie Dobrich of BLM reviewed the history of wild horse management by BLM and the current state of the Sandwash Wild Horse Herd. Her summary is available on the NWCOS website at <http://www.nwcoss.org/30832/index.html>. In response to a question from the group, Valerie stated that BLM does have maps of the seasonal distribution of the horses. One member of the group raised questions about how the original census of the wild horses in northwest Colorado was done, and Valerie said that she has no personal knowledge about that census.

**Public Discussion of Biggest Concerns Regarding Wild Horses**

The group shared their biggest concerns and identified the biggest challenges facing BLM with regard to wild horse management. These concerns and challenges included the following items (this is not a consensus list):

- Sandwash is leased for oil and gas development
- Recreation is popular in the area; a small number of recreational users have been seen chasing horses, wildlife, and sheep on motorized vehicles
- Noise pollution from off-highway vehicles (OHVs) and energy development activities
- Horses crossing fenced area—into or out of the Herd Management Area (HMA)
- Water availability for horses

- Managing for range health/vegetative resource health (year-round use)
- Managing elk as a commodity resource (for hunting) to the detriment of horses
- Invasive species—plants, weeds
- Travel management—limiting OHVs to designated trails and putting up gates and fences to keep vehicles out of certain areas
- Fragile resources that do not recover quickly from damage
- Competing and overlapping uses
- Natural predation (possibly ending mountain lion hunting in the area)
- BLM needs better data on the gender, age, migration patterns, use patterns, and impact on vegetation of horses
- Climate, managing within its limits

When asked to identify their top concerns regarding wild horses, members of the group listed:

- Herd genetics
- Herd size
- Federal law (making sure it's not being superseded by the RMP)
- Vegetative resource health (maintaining and/or improving it, and making it available to multiple uses)
- Lack of flexibility in horse herd management

### **Public Discussion of what is Working with Current Policy**

The group identified what elements of the current herd management policy are working. These elements included (this is not a consensus list):

- Healthy genetics, genetic viability of the horse herd
- Cost-sharing projects
- Not bringing horses from elsewhere to mix with this herd
- Monitoring/inventory (could be an opportunity for cost-sharing projects)
  - Possibility of getting college students to help monitor
- Good relationships among people interested in herd management
- Horses are a visual resource/eco-tourist attraction
  - Easy to get to

### **Review of RMP Process and NWCOS Role**

Kristi reviewed the RMP process and NWCOS's role in it. This process has been summarized in a document that is available on the NWCOS website at:

<http://nwcoss.org/Subcommittees/Introductory%20info%20for%20April%20Subcom%20meetings.pdf>.

### **Review of Draft RMP Alternatives for Wild Horses**

Andrea Minor of BLM summarized the content of the current version of alternatives addressing wild horse management (on page 43 of the alternatives document, which is available at:

[http://nwcoss.org/Resources/BLM%20Documents/BLM%20Draft%20Alternatives\\_7-13-05.pdf](http://nwcoss.org/Resources/BLM%20Documents/BLM%20Draft%20Alternatives_7-13-05.pdf)).

In response to the creation of a Wild Horse Range in Alternative D, BLM staff told the group that this change would not affect existing oil and gas leases. One participant expressed concern

that oil and gas leasing will reduce habitat for horses as has happened in the White River Field Office.

In response to this review of the alternatives for wild horse management, the group was also asked to brainstorm a list of possible solutions for addressing the concerns/challenges facing BLM as it tries to plan herd management for the next 20 years. This list included (this is not a consensus list):

- More/on-going monitoring—not just of vegetation. Include assessment of biotic needs of horses (what the herd needs to be sustained in perpetuity).
- Partnerships
- Travel management plan
- Clarity regarding BLM's 4-year assessment of horses; current wording is too vague
- Develop conditions of approval to protect good forage. Work with industry before development occurs.
- Consider including in range of alternatives re-opening of Douglas Mountain Herd Management Area; National Park Service may be agreeable to this, even though some of this area is in Dinosaur National Monument
- Need discussion of meaning of word “range” as it used in alternatives document; ensure that it is in line with existing laws
- Look at expanding Sandwash Herd Management Area to address habitat needs for herd and historical uses of habitat

When asked to list their biggest fears related to wild horse management, the group listed (without consensus) the creation of a huge HMA covering the whole Little Snake Resource Area and horses being seen and managed as a use instead of a natural resource.

When asked to identify their hopes for wild horse management, the group said (without consensus) that they hoped the RMP would improve the aesthetics of the natural value of the area and make it wilder and that it would improve the vegetative resource so that it can support all uses of the land.