

Summary Points from the
The 2009 Conference on Wild & Feral Horse and Burro Management and Policy

The Wild & Feral Horse and Burro Management and Policy conference was jointly hosted by the Nevada Section and Society for Range Management (SRM) as a component of SRM's ongoing Center for Professional Education and Development seminars. The conference was held in Sparks, Nevada at John Ascuaga's Nugget from November 3-5, 2009. Approximately 150 people attended representing diverse interests and backgrounds ranging from wild horse advocates, rangeland management professionals, BLM, FS, state and county government, several Native American tribes, academia, conservation groups, Humane Society of the US, domestic horse breeders and ranchers.

The purpose of the conference was to search for practical solutions to the current wild horse and burro (WHB) dilemma on public rangelands and the issue of domestic horse disposal and release upon public and private lands due to the downturn in the economy and lack of economic disposal methods due to closure of all horse slaughter facilities in the US. The first portions of the conference provided a tour of the BLM Palomino Valley WHB Center and educational presentations. The tour and presentations were provided to establish basic ecological, biological and economic realities surrounding both feral and wild horse management; practical solutions must be based upon these realities.

Several very key points of consensus were derived from the conference discussion forums transcending all breakout sessions:

- 1) Congress must adequately and reliably fund the management of WHB on public lands
- 2) Wild horses and burros belong on public rangelands of the western US as a component of the multiple use concept and must be managed for a thriving ecological balance in context with other multiple uses as required by the 1971 WHB Act.
- 3) Congress must be fiscally responsible to the American public.
- 4) Maintaining rangeland health (upland and riparian) is imperative! All multiple uses on public rangelands must be managed for a thriving ecological balance that is sustainable over the long term and provides for the health and well being of wildlife, horses and burros, rural cultures and economies and the rangeland resources on which all are dependent.
- 5) HR 1018, the ROAM Act, was not supported by anyone or any entity represented at the conference.
- 6) Tribal entities, their sovereign lands, enterprises, cultures and economies are being adversely affected by US federal policies and regulations on wild horse and burro management, and loss of disposal of their excess horses through US horse slaughter facilities.
- 7) Tribes want to be consulted and included in policy and regulatory development processes as delineated in current law and regulation. The tribal representatives present at the

conference all expressed their disappointment in lack of consultation and coordination from federal entities.

- 8) There is a need for credible information and education about wild horses, their management, impact upon rangelands, population numbers and dynamics, fertility control, alternative management options, etc. An information clearinghouse consisting of representatives from various associated interests, agency representatives, academia and range science was proposed.

Although not unanimous, the majority of attendants supported DOI Secretary Salazar's WHB management proposal as a beginning. However, in order for the Secretary's proposal to be successful, WHB populations on the public rangelands must be brought to and kept at appropriate management levels (AML). AML on public rangelands must be achieved in order to:

- protect rangelands and multiple uses
- maintain the number of excess horses from public rangelands in equilibrium with disposal potential, i.e. the number of wild horses in long-term holding cannot continue to increase and should be eliminated over time

Additionally, the majority expressed the opinion that Congress cannot continue to mandate BLM management of wild horses while depriving BLM any of the management options authorized in the 1971 WHB Act and withholding adequate and consistent funding.