Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Fertility Control Workshop

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Why do we need a workshop?

Despite decades of research on fertility control in wild horses, its use in management is still limited


- Three National Academy of Science reports since the early 1980s have recommended research into and implementation of fertility control for wild horse and burro population management

- But those recommendations for implementation have for the most part not been put into practice
Timeline for Wild Horse and Burro Protection and Management

1971: Wild Horse and Burro Act passed
- Provides specific protections to “all unbranded and unclaimed horses and burros on public land of the United States” and makes it a crime for anyone to harass or kill these animals on federal land

1978: Adoption program started for horses gathered from the range
National Academy of Science Committee Reports

1980, 1982, and 1991 reports from NAS committees that were asked to develop and evaluate specific research programs and activities relating to wild horse and burro management
Horse Populations in BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program

Source: Population-size estimates and numbers of animals removed and in holding facilities provided by BLM
Due to increasing, unsustainable cost of the program

2009: Senate Committee on Appropriations instructed BLM to prepare “a new comprehensive long-term plan and policy.”

2011: BLM published a proposed strategy for future management

• Strategy included commissioning a National Academy of Science report to “review earlier reports and make recommendations on how the BLM should proceed in light of the latest scientific research.”
Most recent NAS committee analysis & report

- NAS committee convened in 2011 was not asked to design or review specific research projects
- Instead, it was directed to use the previous reports and any subsequent research to inform an independent evaluation of the science, methods, and technical decision-making approaches of BLM’s management program
Committee conducted independent evaluation of:

- Population Size and Growth Rates
- Population Assessment Processes
- Fertility Management
- Genetic Diversity
- Population Modeling
- Social Considerations
- Methods for Establishing and Adjusting Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs)
Criteria considered for assessing the most promising Fertility Control methods

- Efficacy
- Duration of effect
- Availability
- Delivery method
- Side effects
  - Must be safe
  - Preserve behavioral system
Methods that met the most Criteria

Female-Directed
- PZP products
- GonaCon

Male-Directed
- Chemical vasectomy

Since the report, even more potential methods have been identified
Main Committee Conclusions

Business-as-Usual practices will continue to move more horses into long-term holding

- Horse fecundity combined with gathers and removals (which maximize “harvest”) results in continued growth rates of 15-20%
- With those growth rates, BLM cannot balance removals with adoptions

Warehousing horses in long-term holding is not economically sustainable or acceptable to segments of the public

- About half of FY2012 Wild Horse and Burro Program budget was spent on horses in long-term holding
- Public discontent was expressed at Committee information-gathering meetings and in written comments
Fertility-control research and implementation were recommended for management of free-roaming horses and burros

Methods to improve wild horse and burro management practices are available

The report is online at www.nap.edu
What is missing?

▪ Waiting for a “magic bullet”?
▪ Delivery/application challenges?

This Workshop will present:

▪ Updates on methods of fertility control
▪ Strategies for implementation
▪ Directions for research and development
Botstiber Institute for Wildlife Fertility Control

Part of the mission of the Institute is to support workshops that bring together wildlife managers, policy-makers and the public to disseminate information and encourage collaboration.